

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THE HOLY SPIRIT GOES TO WORK:
FACILITATING MARKETPLACE MINISTRY IN A BLUE-COLLAR CONTEXT

A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE
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ABSTRACT

Contemporary blue-collar employees often fail to appreciate the biblical significance of ordinary human labor. Consequently, they perceive work as a necessary evil while frustration and alienation characterize time spent on the job.

This research utilized data from the Discipleship Dynamics Assessment to compare the attitudes of blue-collar workers (N=31) to those of a paired sample of white-collar workers. Significant differences were observed on thirteen outcomes associated with vocation and sense of calling indicating that, compared to white-collar workers, blue-collar workers have a significantly lower sense of divine purpose, calling, and giftedness in relation to their work. Furthermore, they consistently see themselves as less connected to their workplaces strategically and relationally than do white-collar workers.

To address this discrepancy, a sermon series, discussion materials, and other work-related ministry resources were developed for use at Jefferson Assembly of God in Meriden, Kansas. Thirty-one blue-collar employees participated in a four-week process designed to challenge work-related misconceptions through the presentation of a biblical theology of work. The series concluded with a commissioning service created to acknowledge and celebrate God's Kingdom-advancing purposes always present in all labor, including ordinary labor.

As a result, workers reported a new understanding of their labor as God-ordained, already significant in the advance of Christ's kingdom today, and made eternally valuable when refined and renewed through Christ's redeeming work.

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I am thankful to Hazel Strickland, my administrative assistant, to Pastor Blaine Moore, who serves with me in leadership, and to the board and body of Jefferson Assembly of God in Meriden, Kansas. For so many years, we have worked together to display “the manifold wisdom of God” (Eph. 3:10) to our community and world, and you have been both gracious to me and supportive of me the entire way.

I am indebted to my mother, Barbara, who first taught me to love learning and whose support has been significant in this effort, and to my father, Lester, who—now

home with the Lord—will always be to me the perfect combination of skillful hands and a servant’s heart.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Context

The local church serves as the foundational expression of the body of Christ throughout the world and the fundamental means by which God's Kingdom advances. Educational institutions, parachurch organizations, and similar entities all fill significant and necessary roles. Still, interaction between a local congregation and its community remains the place where, in large measure, the Kingdom either advances or fails to advance. At the local level, individuals and communities either experience the transformation of Christ or continue their march toward eternity without Him.

My own ministry has been devoted to and centered within the local church. For twenty-five years I have served as pastor to Jefferson Assembly of God, a Kansas congregation of fairly typical Assemblies of God history and character. The church grew from Bible studies in a local home some thirty-seven years ago. The congregation has seen reasonably steady growth since then, but in recent years has plateaued at an average Sunday morning attendance around 230.

Members of Jefferson Assembly come from four small communities in the area (each less than 1,000 in population) and from the northeast edges of the state's capital city, Topeka. Significantly for purposes of this study, employment is generally at blue-collar manufacturing jobs and more varied pink-collar jobs,¹ including government-related clerical

¹ See "Definition of Terms" on page 5. For sake of clarity and readability, this study will utilize the label "blue-collar" or "working-class" with no exclusion of pink-collar work or workers intended.

work and education-related employment with the local school district. The church's participants represent five area school districts. Most adherents generally live in rural or small-town settings within a fifteen-mile radius of the church. The congregation enjoys relatively new facilities that were constructed ten years ago on a two-lane state highway just outside of one of the communities served.

Jefferson Assembly of God is staffed with a full-time senior pastor, full-time youth and children's pastor, and full-time secretary. Ongoing ministry includes most of the programs a person might expect in an Assemblies of God church, for example, a Sunday worship service, Sunday school, and Royal Rangers, M-pact Girls Clubs, children's church, and youth meetings. Additionally, seasonal events and targeted outreaches pepper the annual calendar. In many ways, then, Jefferson Assembly of God represents a prototypical Assemblies of God congregation, making my ministry context similar to thousands of others across the nation.

The Problem

Like so many churches, members of Jefferson Assembly of God often express frustration at not being able to serve more fully in the various ministries of the church because of work obligations. Along the same vein, members sometimes convey deep-seated unhappiness with their work environments, work-related relationships, and work demands. Although both reflections hold merit, they also expose a presumption that in a perfect world, there would be less involvement in work and more involvement in the kinds of spiritually significant things that go on at church.

This presumption reveals two false presuppositions: (1) that real ministry only happens at the church facilities, and (2) that employment only pays the bills so people can get

on to things that really matter. The Bible reveals something different about significant spiritual activity and about the dignity and value of work.

The Scriptures, for example, hold work in remarkably high regard in and of itself. In Genesis 1, as God's work of creation unfolds, He deliberately and thoughtfully declares each progressive development "good" (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31).² Upon forming Adam, God immediately gives him significant responsibility and authority. In an environment unmarred by sin, Adam continues the work God began, shaping the world by the work of His hands.

Work remains valuable and virtuous throughout the Old Testament. God blesses the household of Potiphar under Joseph's competent management and empowers Bezalel with all necessary skills for the construction of the tabernacle. Key elements in the Mosaic Covenant reveal God's concern for just treatment of the laborer and Proverbs celebrates the prosperity that hard work brings.

Instead of valuing labor, however, many individuals live alienated from it. People dread Monday and celebrate Friday. Even believers often endure jobs they sometimes despise, convinced that no other attitude is possible, much less merited. They have yet to connect the intrinsic dignity of work with the realities of a difficult day at the office or the challenges of working third shift at the plant.

Moreover, unaware of their place in a "royal priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:9), many have fully isolated work from worship, leading secular lives void of sacred meaning apart from the hour or two they might spend at a church activity each week. They fail to recognize that their

²All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version.

ministry as a member of the body of Christ extends beyond the walls of the church building to include anyplace and everyplace they go.

The New Testament, however, affirms a cooperative relationship between the believer's daily tasks and the outworking of God's eternal plan. The redeemed "are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10). Paul affirms that even the most demanding labor is ultimately offered not to one's employer but to Christ. To slaves he writes, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Col. 3:23-24). Interestingly, what some suggest were nothing more than shop rags for the Apostle Paul became means of grace, "so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them" (Acts 19:12). The saving act of God in Christ redeems all things, including otherwise ordinary and even wearisome toil.

The church must renew her understanding of the workplace as another domain of life where the reign of Christ must be manifested. The believer must embrace an understanding of work as fundamentally good and an opportunity to declare God's greatness in the power of the Spirit. Followers of Christ must recognize the workplace as a mission field "ripe for harvest" (John 4:35) and themselves as the laborers Christ has chosen and anointed for the task. The members of Jefferson Assembly of God are no different, standing in need of fresh confidence, understanding, and involvement in workplace ministry.

The Purpose

This project seeks to infuse members of the work force who attend Jefferson Assembly of God with a deep and motivating sense of the call of God, specifically with regard to their job, their workplace, and their coworkers, through the development and implementation of a short-term local church intervention aided by the analysis of relevant discipleship-measurement data. The intervention will give special emphasis to facilitating each participant's understanding of his or her sense of vocation as a divinely granted opportunity for Kingdom-advancing ministry in the name of Christ.

Definition of Terms

Blue-collar Worker—a member of the working class generally associated with manual labor. Blue-collar workers may be skilled or unskilled and are usually involved in physically building or maintaining something.

Pink-collar Worker—a member of the working class associated with service sector jobs stereotypically held by women, for example, day care workers, public school teachers, hairdressers, and secretaries.

Workplace—the place in which a person works on either a voluntary or paid basis.

Marketplace—used interchangeably with workplace.

Description of the Proposed Project

Scope of the Project

This project will educate, motivate, commission, and encourage members of Jefferson Assembly of God toward engagement in workplace ministry. The process will take place in six phases. First, I will complete a biblical-theological review of pertinent work-related Scripture passages, concentrating on the nature of work itself, the role of the Holy Spirit in

human labor, and the significance of the believer's work in light of Christ's Kingdom. I will also conduct a contemporary literature review researching the particulars of blue-collar culture and investigating both historical and contemporary efforts at faith-work integration within the blue-collar context.

Second, I will recruit volunteers from Jefferson Assembly of God to complete the Discipleship Assessment™ from Discipleship Dynamics.³ Data from those assessments will be combined with Discipleship Assessment™ data from other churches across the nation for analysis. I will examine the sections of available data specifically addressing work-faith integration in pursuit of identifiable differences between white-collar and blue-collar marketplace ministry. Pertinent findings will impact the development of intervention materials.

Third, I will develop resource materials addressing the biblical view of work, the opportunity to serve a Kingdom-advancing role even in the workplace, and the authorization to do so through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. These resources will consist of a four-week sermon series, a small-group Bible study, and the development of a mechanism for follow-up and support during the fifth phase of the project.

Fourth, I will recruit thirty field intervention participants. Blue-collar personnel will be recruited by targeting individuals who are employed a minimum of thirty-two hours a week in a job not requiring a college degree. These participants will complete a pre-

³ Johan Mostert, "Holiness as a Function of Psycho-behavioral Monitoring and Spiritual Mentoring: The *Talmideem Agenda* Research Project" (presented at the 42nd Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Seattle, WA, March 23, 2013), and Johan Mostert, "Outcomes-based Research on Spirit-filled Discipleship: Progress Report (Year II)" (presented at the 43rd Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Springfield, MO, March 6, 2014).

assessment using the Discipleship Assessment™ tool. Then, with the resources developed in phase three, I will conduct a four-week intervention at Jefferson Assembly of God, concluding with a distinctive service prayerfully commissioning blue-collar workers to embrace God-given opportunities for ministry in their workplace context.

Fifth, over the following six weeks, those individuals who submitted to commissioning will be invited to participate in a follow-up group providing encouragement and feedback in their efforts to embrace marketplace ministry. At the conclusion of the intervention, participants will again be asked to complete both interview sessions and the Discipleship Assessment™ as post-assessment tools.

Sixth, I will conduct a quantitative assessment of the intervention by analyzing any significant difference between the pre- and post- Discipleship Assessment™ scores of intervention participants. Additionally, I will conduct a qualitative assessment by means of follow-up interviews conducted in both one-on-one and small-group settings. Based on the results of those assessments, I will develop recommendations for Jefferson Assembly of God in particular and for local churches generally. I will also offer suggestions for future research.

Phases of the Project

The design of the project will incorporate five phases of development, including research, planning, implementation, evaluation, and writing. Some phases will occur linearly while others will occur simultaneously. The research and writing for the biblical-theological review and general literature review will occur prior to the field project, thereby informing the content of the project itself.

Research

The first stage of this project involves research into the biblical-theological foundations of work and its relationship to Christian faith. The second stage examines contemporary literature for insight into the nature of the blue-collar worker and his or her culture and worldview.

Biblical-theological foundation

Chapter 2 will focus on the dignity ascribed to labor in the Scriptures, the concept and implications of the priesthood of all believers in relation to the workplace, and the significance of Holy Spirit empowerment for all believers in the work environment. The study itself will ultimately determine the final focus of the chapter, but starting points for consideration from the Old Testament will include the Genesis creation account, the work of Joseph in leading Egypt through famine, the experiences of Bezalel in building Israel's tabernacle, and the leadership of Daniel in the ancient nation of Babylon. Potential New Testament sources include the significance of Jesus' early years as a carpenter, the disciples' occupations, the sometimes bi-vocational ministry of the Apostle Paul, and key epistolary passages like Colossians 3:22-4:1.

General literature review

The general literature review will pursue resources tied to the unique qualities of blue-collar workers and their culture. This study grows from the premise that blue-collar workers perceive their work and their world differently than white-collar workers and that understanding and articulating these differences remains fundamental to helping them develop a biblical perspective on marketplace ministry. Using resources from the social sciences, labor-related governmental studies, contemporary business texts, and available

material on issues related to integrating faith and work, chapter 3 will seek to articulate those characteristics, practices, and attitudes found most strongly in the blue-collar world. Chapter 3 will also examine the relationship of blue-collar labor to the Faith at Work movement both historically and currently.

Preparation

This project will require the recruitment and coordination of volunteers to complete a Discipleship Assessment™ and the analysis of data from those assessments once that information is combined with the responses of other assessment participants nationally. Specifically, data will be analyzed to uncover any distinctions between blue-collar and white-collar perspectives on the integration of faith and work. Additionally, the project will involve identifying and recruiting focus group participants for the local church intervention, coordinating pre-intervention assessments with those participants, and directing the focus group meetings themselves. Finally, the project will entail developing a four-week sermon series, an accompanying small group study, a mechanism for participant support during the follow-up phase, and the management of both quantitative and qualitative post-assessments.

Implementation

The recruitment of general volunteers for the initial round of discipleship assessments will occur in January 2014. The responses of these individuals will help to provide the baseline data for analysis designed to identify distinctions between blue-collar and white-collar workers. Recruitment and pre-assessment of the thirty field intervention participants will be done during the summer of 2014. The actual field intervention will begin in September 2014. The intervention will require a total of ten weeks, including four weeks of Sunday worship services and small-group Bible studies followed by six weeks geared toward

facilitating participant integration of the principles and practices introduced during the study series.

Evaluation

Upon conclusion, the field intervention will employ both qualitative and quantitative assessment for results measurement. Quantitative assessment will rely on a second completion of the Discipleship Assessment™ by intervention participants. A qualitative assessment will be conducted through follow-up interviews. The assessments will be designed to measure change in participants' understanding, attitudes, and actions with regard to blue-collar marketplace ministry. The intervention should produce participants who understand better the high regard the Scriptures give to human labor, the ways in which God works out His eternal purposes through humanity's work, the workplace itself as another domain where Christ's authority can be evidenced, and the sacred nature of that place and those tasks so commonly understood as secular.

Writing

The writing phase of this project will be concentrated within the summer and fall months of 2014. The biblical-theological review (chapter 2) and the contemporary literature review (chapter 3) will be completed during the summer months prior to the field intervention itself. An account of the field project (chapters 4) and summary assessment of the entire endeavor (chapter 5) will be completed in October after the conclusion of the field intervention.

Conclusion

The role of faith in the lives of blue-collar workers remains a subject largely ignored within the local church. An examination of the biblical connection between work and faith in the context of ordinary labor will provide a solid foundation for the development of resources facilitating workplace ministry in this neglected environment. The implementation of these developmental tools holds potential to effect new insight and changed behavior among America's blue-collar work force, producing a more holistic practice of discipleship and a more comprehensive advance of Christ's kingdom.

CHAPTER 2: BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Perhaps no single subject dominates the personal landscape of Americans more than workplace concerns. Frustrations with hours, assignments, and expectations, the challenges and rewards of co-worker relationships, anxieties regarding job security, the delights of career advancement, or concern over lack of the same, and even worries about retirement capture the attention of Americans while both on and off the clock. Many workers despise their jobs while other workers delight in them. A few even seem to experience both responses simultaneously.

Christians often ponder the same questions and experience the same challenges. Believers commonly struggle with questions of faith and the workplace. Many see no real connection between the place of employment and the house of worship, no association between the daily devotion and the daily grind. Scripture, however, reveals a strong and significant relationship between the workplace and faith, addressing work-related questions and concerns with answers that often contrast conventional wisdom.

Three key passages form the basis of a solid biblical-theological framework for discerning biblical answers to work-related questions. This chapter will examine these passages and suggest that work be ultimately understood as imputed through creation, informed by rest, empowered by the Spirit, and fueled by anticipation. Such an understanding holds potential to transform the worker, the workplace, and the world by equipping the

Christian worker to engage his or her work responsibilities as an opportunity for kingdom-advancing service.

Imputed Through Creation

The language of Genesis 1 invites the reader to marvel as God’s creation of the heavens and the earth unfolds. The Scriptures establish clearly the pattern for how God works; He speaks, and life results. This happens verse by verse, like the growing refrain of a great concerto’s musical theme. At God’s voice, light fills the darkness, vegetation fills the land, fish fill the oceans, creatures fill the forests, and birds fill the air.¹

In Genesis 1:26, however, the Divine Composer introduces a new motif and a new instrument through which to sound it: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’”² This straightforward declaration and the verses that surround it begin the biblical revelation that shapes a Christian perspective on work.

God as Worker and Humanity in His Image

The Scriptures declare humanity as formed “in the image of God” (Gen. 1:26), a quality unique among all created entities. Fundamentally, no more powerful statement about humanity’s place in created order exists. “By the doctrine of the image of God, Genesis

¹ In recent years, significant attention has been given to the relationship between the creation accounts of Genesis 1-2 and the claims of modern science. For a compelling effort at reconciliation, see Paul Elbert, “Genesis 1 and the Spirit: A Narrative-Rhetorical Ancient Near Eastern Reading in Light of Modern Science,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 15, no. 1 (October 2006): 23-72.

² All Scripture references, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version.

affirms the dignity and worth of man, and elevates all men—not just kings or nobles—to the highest status conceivable, short of complete divinization.”³

Although the implications of this statement have been understood in various ways over the years,⁴ David J. A. Clines argues convincingly that Genesis 1:26 reveals God’s original intention of all humanity serving as His representatives throughout the earth. Specifically, Clines observes that, like Genesis, the literature of both ancient Egypt and ancient Mesopotamia also uses the phrase “the image of god.” These references describe each nation’s king, but only the king as the one chosen to rule as that god’s singular representative over the land.⁵ In contrast to those ancient Near Eastern accounts, however, Genesis expands God’s commission to include “[hu]mankind generally, without distinction between king and commoner, man and woman, or Israelite and non-Israelite.”⁶

Scripture confirms the representative nature of humanity with the phrase “and let them rule” (Gen. 1:26). This duty, although not the same as formation in the image of God, links inseparably to it and connects humanity’s leadership in the earth to God’s authority over the earth. Indeed, “Genesis 1:26 may well be rendered: ‘Let us make man as our image ... so that they may rule.’”⁷ Ultimately, Clines suggests, “the image ... comes to expression

³ David J. A. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (January 1, 1968): 54.

⁴ For a thorough survey of perspectives on the significance of this phrase, see Gunnlaugur A. Jónsson, *The Image of God: Genesis 1:26-28 in a Century of Old Testament Research* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1988).

⁵ In the literature of ancient Egypt, for example, the Egyptian god Amon-Re says to King Amenophis III, “You are my beloved son, who came forth from my members, my image, whom I have put on the earth. I have given to you to rule the earth in peace.” Cf. Clines, 85.

⁶ Clines, 94.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

not in the nature of man so much as in his activity and function. This function is to represent God's lordship to the lower orders of creation."⁸

That function finds expression through humanity's work. Scripture declares humanity formed in the image of God as part of a broader passage revealing God as Worker. "By the seventh day, God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done" (Gen. 2:2-3). "Work" appears three times in two verses. It translates *mela'ka*, a word used to describe God's work only four times in the entire Old Testament, yet with three of those four uses here. Elsewhere, the Old Testament uses *mela'ka* 151 times, each time describing ordinary human work. By repeatedly using a common word for human labor to describe the work of God and connecting that emphasis contextually with humanity's formation in the image of God, Scripture inextricably ties humanity's work to God's work.⁹

Indeed, the work assigned to humanity both assumes God's imputed dominion and achieves it. God commands male and female to "fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). God places the man in the Garden "to work it and take care of it" (2:15). As Ian Hart observes, Adam's work in the garden fulfills God's command to subdue the earth "because it is making the soil produce what you need to it produce rather than simply taking what happens to grow there."¹⁰ Adam's task of tending the garden replicates God's work in forming the garden, expressing and extending God's dominion over creation.

⁸ Ibid., 101.

⁹ Ian Hart, "Genesis 1:1-2:3 as a Prologue to the Book of Genesis," *Tyndale Bulletin* 46, no. 2 (November 1, 1995): 316.

¹⁰ Ibid., 323.

Ben Witherington, referencing Terence Fretheim's discussion of creation, notes that the verb "subdue" as used in Genesis 1:27 suggests "a built-in wildness to [creation], and various kinds of inherent potential for growth and development."¹¹ Adam's assignment may have included even the expansion of the garden to include increasing areas of the earth. Of course, such an understanding would illuminate the need to "fill the earth" (Gen. 1:28) in order to subdue it. All this activity reflects humanity's creation in the image of the God who expresses His dominion through His work.

The revelation of God as Worker stretches far beyond the creation account. The Old Testament repeatedly portrays God's redemptive activity toward Israel using the language of labor: "... the refiner's fire, the metal worker's forge, irrigation, bleaching, building, pottery, forestry and threshing."¹² In the New Testament, Jesus describes God as characteristically working: "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working" (John 5:17). Indeed, Jesus exhorts His disciples to join in the work of the Father: "As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me" (9:4).

Jesus' words echo Genesis 2:15 and serve as a clear invitation to work with God, extending His creative acts. Interestingly, this invitation to partnership with God stands in stark contrast to other creation accounts birthed in the Ancient Near East. The Babylonian creation myth, *Enûma Eliš*, for example, suggests humanity's creation so that the gods might be relieved of their work and appears designed to underscore "in the minds of its celebrants

¹¹ Ben Witherington, *Work: A Kingdom Perspective on Labor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 2.

¹² James Francis, "God as Worker: A Metaphor from Daily Life in Biblical Perspective," in *Metaphor, Canon and Community: Jewish, Christian and Islamic Approaches*, ed. Ralph Bisschops and James Francis (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 16.

that they were slaves.”¹³ A Sumerian text provides a similar motive among the Sumerian gods with “Nammu, the primordial sea-goddess, urging her son Enki, god of wisdom and water, to create men to relieve the gods from their toil.”¹⁴ The Atrahasis Epic offers a Mesopotamian perspective:

Create a human to bear the yoke.

Let him bear the yoke, the task of Enlil,

Let man carry the load of the gods.¹⁵

In each contrasting account, the gods form humanity for tasks of which the gods want no part. In Genesis, God invites humanity to share in His labor and leadership.

Even in forming Adam, God works: “Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7). Here Scripture relies again on the language of labor, picturing God’s hands-on activity through the use of the Hebrew word *yāsar*. Throughout the Old Testament, *yāsar* conveys the activity of a craftsman and, most frequently, the work of a potter forming the clay.¹⁶

The creation account, then, reveals God as Worker and celebrates humanity as formed in God’s image for the express purpose of carrying out His reign on the earth, intricately

¹³ Bruce K. Waltke, “Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 133, no. 529 (January 1, 1976): 34.

¹⁴ Clines, 63.

¹⁵ A. R. Millard, “A New Babylonian ‘Genesis’ Story,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 18 (January 1, 1967): 99.

¹⁶ Willem VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 504.

tying those responsibilities to human labor. Through creation, God imputes to humanity His nature as Worker.

Work as God’s Gift, Not Humanity’s Curse

Some people, misinterpreting Genesis 3:17-19, have mistakenly understood labor as nothing more than part of the curse that results from Adam’s sin. But a closer look at the creation account reveals that work clearly existed before the Fall, not only as part of God’s nature imputed to humanity but also as part of the perfect environment gifted by God to humanity. Having created a well-watered garden full of “trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food” (Gen. 2:9), the Scriptures announce, “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (v. 15). Eden, although likely the name of a specific place, means “delight.”¹⁷ The word itself suggests a joy for Adam in pursuing the tasks at hand. This was no servile assignment to backbreaking toil, but rather, the opportunity to reign with God over all the earth under the most ideal conditions.¹⁸ Like everything else about the Garden of Eden, work flowed from God’s nature as His blessing to humanity.

Specifically, Adam’s task was to “work” and “take care of” the garden. The author of Genesis chose two verbs, *shamar*, keep/work, and *abad*, serve, used consistently throughout the Pentateuch in describing the ministry offered by Israel’s priests. This priestly language

¹⁷ Kenneth L. Barker, *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary: Old Testament*, vol. 1, later printing ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 7.

¹⁸ For a fuller discussion on God’s purpose of co-regency in humanity’s creation, see Jack W. Hayford, *Worship His Majesty: How Praising the King of Kings Will Change Your Life*, rev. exp. (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light Publications, 2000).

suggests the Garden of Eden as a type of sanctuary,¹⁹ and hints at Adam’s labor in the garden as an act “of spiritual service of the Lord.”²⁰

G. Charles Aalders suggests that “caring for” the Garden included defending it against “hostile forces.”²¹ Bruce Waltke agrees: “As priest and guardians of the garden, Adam and Eve should have driven out the serpent.”²² Adam’s responsibilities in the garden, then, included not only the cultivation of the ground but also the defense of God’s territory. As Walter Brueggemann notes, “From the beginning the human creature is called, given a vocation, and expected to share in God’s work.”²³

The confusion regarding the nature of work as God’s gift generally rises from the narrative that unfolds beginning with Genesis 2:4. Here the attention of Scripture shifts from the majestic creation of the cosmos to “human persons as the glory and central problem of creation.”²⁴ Although formed in the image of God, Adam and Eve succumb to deception and violate God’s singular command. In judgment, God says to Adam, “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life” (Gen. 3:17).

¹⁹ Bruce Waltke suggests that the Garden of Eden “represents territorial space in the created order where God invites human beings to enjoy bliss and harmony between themselves and God, one another, animals, and the land.” Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 85. Several commentators observe the parallel between the language of Genesis 2:2 and Exodus 40:33, where Moses “finished the work” of building the Tabernacle.

²⁰ Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 124.

²¹ G. Charles Aalders, *Genesis, The Bible Student’s Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 92.

²² Waltke, *Genesis*, 87.

²³ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 46.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

God's straightforward declaration reveals the impact of Adam's rebellion on the character of humanity's work. "Man's sin does not only affect himself, his relationship with God and with others, but it also affects the natural order."²⁵ Although the exact nature of this impact is disputed,²⁶ clearly work takes on a more difficult and burdensome quality as a result of Adam's transgression. Such remains the case today, with work sometimes both frustrating and fruitless. Edward Veith describes the tension: "Work can indeed be satisfying, since it is what we were made for, but it can also be frustrating, pointless, and exhausting. Work is a virtue ... tainted by sin."²⁷ But the nature of work as a gift from God intrinsic to the created order continues—a created order God himself repeatedly pronounced "good."²⁸ "It is not work itself but the toilsomeness of work that was added to the equation as a result of the curse involved in the Fall."²⁹

Work, then, stands as God's territory, begun at His initiative, consistent with His nature, and blessed with His authority and purpose. Formed in His image, human beings stand privileged to continue the work of God as revealed and rooted in creation itself. Although impacted by humanity's rebellion, work remains God's gift as part of a creation declared good by a perfect God and promised restoration through Jesus Christ.

²⁵ Terence E. Fretheim, *Creation, Fall, and Flood: Studies in Genesis 1-11* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969), 89.

²⁶ See, for example, Laurie Braaten, "All Creation Groans: Romans 8:22 in Light of the Biblical Sources," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 28, no. 2 (November 1, 2006): 131–159.

²⁷ Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 63.

²⁸ Cf. Genesis 1:4, 9, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31.

²⁹ Witherington, 3.

Informed By Rest

For all the value the Scriptures give it, work never stands complete in and of itself. Biblical work, imputed through creation, must also be informed by biblical rest—a ceasing from the kind of labor that suggests human self-sufficiency and a celebration of the completed work of Christ.

God at Rest and Humanity in His Image

In the first glimpse of the God who works, creating all that is, Scripture also reveals a God who rests. “By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done” (Gen. 2:2-3). By observing the seventh day as a day of rest, God establishes a pattern for living that includes recurring rest. The triplicate mention of the seventh day highlights its significance in relation to the others. Ironically, even in resting, God still accomplishes: “In the first six days,” says Waltke, “space is subdued; on the seventh, time is sanctified.”³⁰

“Rested” in Genesis 2:2-3 translates the Hebrew word *shabbat*, meaning to “stop working” or “make rest.”³¹ Perhaps closer to “cease” in meaning than to “rest” as understood today; “it is not a word that refers to remedying exhaustion after a tiring week of work. Rather, it describes the enjoyment of accomplishment, the celebration of completion.”³² Interestingly, Genesis 2:2-3 contains no requirement of any kind of religious observance

³⁰ Waltke, *Genesis*, 67.

³¹ Willem VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 41.

³² Ross, 113-114.

concurrent with the Sabbath rest of God. Still, such observances eventually take on a primary significance in the cultic life of Israel as the people of God. The priestly Decalogue in Exodus 20 explicitly connects Sabbath observance and religious worship, describing the seventh day as “a sabbath to the Lord your God” (Exod. 20:10). By that point, some understanding of Sabbath observance must have already existed in the experience of the Israelites, as a Sabbath-keeping command had previously been invoked in association with the collection of manna in Exodus 16.

Throughout the Old Testament, Sabbath observance ties together four biblical emphases. First, the command to abstain from work reminds the participant of his or her continuing dependence upon God:

The principle involved here in deciding what is work is not so much the physical nature of an activity but its purpose. If its intent signifies human power over nature, if it shows human mastery of the world by the purposeful and constructive exercise of intelligence and skill, then it is [work] that violates the restful intent of Sabbath time to recognize our dependence on God as ultimate Creator-Sustainer.³³

The prohibition against work, then, reminds the person who has been formed to reign as God’s representative that he or she does not act independently but, rather, representatively in caring for the garden (Gen. 2:21). The commission and authority to act flow from God, who both commands His representatives to rest and who has set the example by doing so himself. This understanding lies behind Moses’ command in Exodus 20, which cites for its basis God’s rest upon the completion of creation: “For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Exod. 20:10).

³³ Tilden Edwards, *Sabbath Time: Understanding and Practice for Contemporary Christians*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2003), 24.

Second, the command in Deuteronomy 5 expands Sabbath observance to include the celebration of the Israelites' deliverance from slavery in Egypt: "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day" (Deut. 5:15). Pinchas Kahn believes that this text reflects Moses' Deuteronomic interpretation of Exodus 20:10, linking together God's creative and redemptive acts: "Sabbath represents not merely a cyclical order of nature, but rather the order of creation caught up in the dynamic movement of salvation history."³⁴

Third, Sabbath observance serves as continuing evidence of the Israelites' unique standing in the world as chosen by God for covenant with Him: "This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy" (Exod. 31:13). Through this correlation, "the creation story is particularized into the creation of a people."³⁵ Just as created order declares "the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1), bearing witness to His voice and activity, so Israel bears witness to His call and redemption through Sabbath observance.

Fourth, as Israel fails to fully conquer the land of Canaan and ultimately suffers exile from it, the Sabbath takes on the quality of a future rest yet to be entered. Israel's prophets infuse the Sabbath with eschatological significance. This theme emerges in the New Testament, as well, with Hebrews 4 exhorting the reader that "the promise of entering his rest still stands" (Heb. 4:1). Harold Dressler sees this projection toward end-time fulfillment as the primary function of the Sabbath even at its introduction in Genesis 2:2-3. God sanctifies

³⁴ Pinchas Kahn, "The Expanding Perspectives of the Sabbath," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (October 2004): 241.

³⁵ Edwards, 26.

the seventh day as “an eschatological, proleptic sign indicating some future rest.”³⁶ For Dressler, more than any other element, God’s Sabbath rest stands as the apex of God’s created order.

By observing the Sabbath, then, the participant remembers and testifies to his or her formation not “independent of” but “in the image of” God and, equally, God’s redemption of the same through His continuing salvific activity. For Israel in particular, Sabbath observance also serves as evidence of her unique position as God’s chosen people (Exod. 31:13, 17). Ultimately, the Sabbath takes on the eschatological character of a rest not yet achieved but still available to be experienced. For the worker busy expressing the image of God, each of these perspectives carries rich significance.

Rest and False Identity

If, as created in the image of God, human nature calls for rest, fallen human nature demands it. In an age replete with time-saving technology, the demands of the calendar remain unsatisfied. The immediacy of electronic communication, rather than resulting in efficient and compact workdays, invites workplace demands into every recess of life. Schedules only intensify with each passing year. “We live in multiple calendars simultaneously, compartmentalizing and juggling the differing rhythms as everyday life demands.”³⁷ Without some built-in mechanism demanding rest, activity only accelerates.

Moreover, perhaps as a distortion of humanity’s God-given propensity toward work, the increasing pace of life and expanding pressure toward achievement often become

³⁶ Harold Dressler, “The Sabbath in the Old Testament,” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 29.

³⁷ Robert Sherman, “Reclaimed by Sabbath Rest,” *Interpretation* 59, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 39.

addictive.³⁸ David Jensen notes this susceptibility within American culture specifically: “Descartes’ mantra,” he writes, “appears to have modified somewhat since the Enlightenment. American workers, consciously or not, embody the slogan, ‘I am busy, therefore I am.’”³⁹ For some, the ever-expanding responsibilities and obligations associated with workplace success develop into the primary source of personal identity. Steven Tuell warns eager workers to examine honestly their motivation. “Perhaps . . . our feverish need for busyness demonstrates not zeal, but anxiety; our drive to be constantly involved may actually reflect our need to be in control.”⁴⁰ Sabbath rest challenges such false presumptions and faulty motivations.

Life does not consist of work alone. “The person who always works,” writes Eldon Trueblood, “is missing the good life as truly as does the person who never works.”⁴¹ The Scriptural invitation to Sabbath rest serves to counteract this destructive temptation, giving the subject regular opportunity for turning back toward God and the completeness found only in relationship with Him. Only when work stands informed by such rest does the worker

³⁸ One recent study, for example, identifies “personality traits, personal inducements, and organizational inducements” as antecedents to workaholism. *Personality traits* include deeply ingrained cognitive and behavioral patterns central to an individual’s personality. *Personal inducements* involve external but personal and family-related factors like financial pressure or a family culture of achievement. *Organizational inducements* exist where workplace environments encourage or demand inordinate company loyalty at the expense of other legitimate priorities. cf. Ying-Wen Liang and Chen-Ming Chu, “Personality Traits and Personal and Organizational Inducements: Antecedents of Workaholism,” *Social Behavior & Personality: An International Journal* 37, no. 5 (June 2009): 649.

³⁹ David H. Jensen, *Responsive Labor: A Theology of Work*, Ann. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 14.

⁴⁰ Steven S. Tuell, “Genesis 2:1-3,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible & Theology* 59, no. 1 (January 2005): 52.

⁴¹ Elton Trueblood, *Your Other Vocation*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper, 1952), 75.

recognize that “identity is not created by our labors, but given by the God who works in Jesus Christ on behalf of creation.”⁴²

Certainly identity and work intersect, both for good and for evil. Work often serves as a means to self-actualization because of the personal development it fosters. Equally, work sometimes functions as a detriment to self-actualization because of the alienation it involves. Without a doubt, then, work impacts human identity. But biblical rest reminds the participant that work must not become the source of identity. Miroslav Volf highlights the necessity of finding identity in Christ alone when he writes, “While we must affirm that human beings can and do develop through work, we must firmly deny that as human beings they are constituted through their work. If God’s relation to human beings is the key to their humanness, then their communion with God is the key to their true identity.”⁴³ Without Sabbath rest, workers risk seeking identity through labor and achievement. Sabbath rest facilitates an identity rooted in relationship with God.

Rest and Self-sufficiency

When God delivered the Hebrew people from the horrors of Egyptian slavery, He commanded that they should both work and rest. Most notably, Israel was called to strictly observe a weekly Sabbath. “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God” (Deut. 5:13). Likewise, through the festival days and convocations that marked Israel’s annual calendar, Israelites were invited to prioritize relationship with one another and with the God who was the source of their true identity. The

⁴² Jensen, 11.

⁴³ Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 132-133.

Israelites were certainly called to productivity, but also reminded each week and on additional feast days throughout the year that they were more than what they might produce. They were God's holy people by virtue of their relationship with Him, having been liberated by Him and called to rest in Him. The Israelites' Sabbath commandment points to how biblical rest invites the grounding of human identity not in the self-sufficiency of human achievement but in the mutual dependency of a community's relationship with God.

Israel's observance of Sabbath rest tangibly declared her faith in God's sufficiency, particularly given that its observance occurred regardless of season. To cease on the seventh day when crops stood in the field ready for harvest definitively announced Israelite confidence that God, not human labor, supplied every need. To "let the land lie unplowed and unused" (Exod. 23:11) every seventh year testified to the same. Indeed, in the exactness of God, over the full seven years the land then enjoyed the same amount of rest as God's people enjoyed through their weekly observance of the Sabbath.

Specifically, biblical rest gives opportunity for worship, celebrating in the present that ultimate work previously completed by Christ on the cross. Rest from human labor declares the sufficiency of the redemptive act of God in Jesus Christ, "for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work" (Heb. 4:10). Through worship facilitated by rest, redeemed humanity declares that "we are justified by grace through faith, not because of the work we do. The measure of our personhood is not the labor we undertake ... Rather, our measure is that God has already adopted us as children."⁴⁴

Properly understood, then, rest serves as a prophylaxis against damning self-sufficiency. Just as some misunderstand work as something accursed and therefore despise it,

⁴⁴ Jensen, 66.

others misunderstand work as salvific and therefore worship it. Scripture, in contrast, identifies work as God’s gift to His creation while announcing humanity’s liberty to cease work by virtue of His redemptive provision in Christ. Sabbath rest results.

Such rest must not be confused with contemporary understandings of leisure. “Leisure,” writes Mark Buchanan writes, “is Sabbath bereft of the sacred.”⁴⁵ Volf describes rest as having been “driven from leisure.”⁴⁶ Jensen affirms this assessment, observing that “vacation spots near the beach and mountains are now littered with outlet malls, as if the pleasure of swimming in the ocean or hiking an alpine trail were not enough. Leisure,” he writes, “has become something that Americans commodify and sell.”⁴⁷ Biblical rest counteracts such fruitless pursuits, encouraging participants to reject the frantic quest for leisure in favor of that ceasing that honors and celebrates God’s redemptive gift. Rest must inform work.

Empowered by the Spirit

The Pattern of Christ and the Scriptures

Although perhaps less familiar than the Genesis creation account, the Scriptures also make significant declarations regarding the relationship between work and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Throughout the Scriptures, of course, the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit stands synonymous with God’s activity among and through His people. From “the Spirit of the Lord ... hovering over the waters” (Gen 1:2) in the opening verses of Scripture

⁴⁵ Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 35.

⁴⁶ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 135.

⁴⁷ Jensen, 18.

to “the Spirit and the bride” (Rev. 22:17) echoing God’s welcome in the closing verses, everywhere that God works in and through His people, the Holy Spirit serves an empowering role.

The New Testament in particular emphasizes the necessity of Holy Spirit empowerment for every believer’s life. For this, Jesus himself serves as humanity’s defining model. Perhaps the Gospel of Luke and its companion volume, the book of Acts, accentuate this need most clearly through the repeated prominence Luke gives to the activity of the Spirit in the life and ministry of Christ. In his Gospel’s opening chapter, for example, Luke affirms Jesus’ divine nature as “the Son of God” (Luke 1:35) but underscores the essential role of the Spirit in the Incarnation itself. Although Luke notes some rather exceptional occurrences during Jesus’ childhood (Luke 2), like the other Gospel writers he offers no evidence of any public ministry by Jesus until after the Spirit anoints Jesus at His baptism in the Jordon (3:21-22).⁴⁸

Additionally, Luke emphasizes the Spirit’s strong leadership both in Jesus’ time of testing in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-2) and in the launch of His ministry in Galilee (v. 14). Perhaps most telling, when Jesus defines himself and His ministry by reading Scripture at His hometown synagogue in Nazareth, Luke records how Jesus chose verses that focused on the role of the Spirit’s empowerment upon Him as opposed to any reference suggesting reliance upon His divine nature. Specifically, given the opportunity to read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, Luke reports that Jesus

found the place where it is written:

⁴⁸ Luke alone observes that it was “as [Jesus] was praying” (Luke 3:21) that the Holy Spirit descended on Him, a noteworthy antecedent to the prayers of Acts 1 that fueled the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
for he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor,
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (vv. 17-19).

By recording Jesus’ choice of this definitive passage, Luke highlights both Jesus’ understanding of His mission and Jesus’ insight into the means by which that mission would be accomplished: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.” With the record of the Holy Spirit’s descent at Jesus’ baptism and the absence of any public ministry prior to that, with the stress placed on the leadership of the Spirit in Jesus’ temptation experience and subsequent ministry visit to Galilee, and with the record of Jesus’ intentional selection of Isaiah 61:1-2 for public reading at the launch of His ministry, Luke paints a clear picture of Jesus as One who carries out His ministry not by virtue of His divine nature but by means of the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon Him.

Jesus’ absolute dependence upon the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in every ministry context serves as a pattern for Jesus’ disciples. Luke records Jesus’ instruction regarding the necessity of Holy Spirit empowerment both at the close of his Gospel (Luke 24:49) and again in the opening chapter of the book of Acts (e.g., Acts 1:4-5, 7-8). Jesus’ directive is clear: Just as He engaged in no public ministry before the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Him at His baptism, so the disciples were instructed, “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised” (Acts 1:4). Once given, the Person of the Holy

Spirit becomes the source behind and orchestrator of the explosive growth of Christian faith as recorded in the book of Acts.

The anointing of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus—not His nature as the divine Son of God—stands central to His ministry as introduced in the Gospels and as continued through the Church in the book of Acts. Given the sense of necessity and urgency attributed to Holy Spirit empowerment in the Scriptures, any biblical understanding of work must engage the priority of the Spirit in relation to work, regardless of the relative scarcity or abundance of biblical texts that seem to directly address the matter.

One key text actually appears comparatively early in the biblical record. As part of the covenant entered into by Israel at Mt. Sinai, God reveals to Moses detailed plans for an elaborate portable tabernacle. God then identifies for Moses the craftsmen He has chosen to lead in the construction of the structure. God chooses and fills with His Spirit a workman by the name of Bezalel in order that the task of tabernacle construction might be accomplished with proper craftsmanship:

Then the Lord said to Moses, “See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills—to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts. Moreover, I have appointed Oholiab son of Ahisamak, of the tribe of Dan, to help him. Also I have given ability to all the skilled workers to make everything I have commanded you” (Exod. 31:1-6).

Little is known of Bezalel and even less of Oholiab. Bezalel descended from Caleb (1 Chron. 2:19), and Oholiab, as the Exodus text declares, came from the tribe of Dan. The

names of Bezalel and Oholiab, however, may have significance: Bezalel probably means “in the shadow/protection of El [‘el, a name for God].”⁴⁹ Oholiab’s name means “‘tent of the father’ or ‘the (divine) father is my tent.’”⁵⁰ The names of these craftsmen, then, may allude to the tabernacle God had commissioned them to construct and, by extension, the covering that Israel’s special relationship with God provides for them.

Although the phrase “the Spirit of God” occurs three other places later in the Pentateuch, God’s filling of Bezalel stands as the first mention of such a moment anywhere in the Scriptures. Its use twice in this section of Exodus (31:3; 35:31) connects the work of Bezalel to the creative activity of the Spirit of God in Genesis 1:2.⁵¹ Richard Hess sees particular significance in parallel language found in Genesis 1 and Exodus 31. Filled⁵² with the Spirit of God, Bezalel and Oholiab “correspond to the word of God that becomes the agent for separation and creation of the cosmos in Genesis 1.”⁵³ David Williams strikes a similar chord, hinting that the order the Spirit brings to creation in Genesis 1, specifically through differentiating and relating matter, echoed in the work of Bezalel and Oholiab through the shaping and assembling of raw materials to create the tabernacle.⁵⁴ Wilf

⁴⁹ Peter Enns, *Exodus*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 543.

⁵⁰ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “Exodus,” in *Genesis-Leviticus*, vol. 1 of *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, edited by Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 536.

⁵¹ David G. Firth and Paul D. Wegner, eds., *Presence, Power and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 543.

⁵² For a challenging discussion regarding the varied but persistent activity of the Spirit in relation to both human and non-human creation, see Andrew K. Gabriel, “The Intensity of the Spirit in a Spirit-Filled World: Spirit Baptism, Subsequence, and the Spirit of Creation,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 34, no. 3 (September 2012): 365-382.

⁵³ Firth and Wegner, 171.

⁵⁴ David T. Williams, “The Spirit in Creation,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 67, no. 01 (2014): 1-14.

Hildebrandt notes that, beyond empowerment for the task of building, this filling of the Spirit also equipped Bezalel and Oholiab for the task of instructing others in the tasks necessary for this significant project.⁵⁵

Further consideration of this text yields three qualities characteristic of Spirit-empowered labor. First, in Spirit-empowered labor, God himself chooses workers and divinely equips them for their assigned tasks. Second, God equips those laborers bountifully, operating, himself, out of abundance, not lack. Third, God establishes work not as an isolated duty but as a community experience. Spirit-empowered work, then, stands shaped by calling, rooted in bounty, and expressed in community.

Shaped by Calling

Since the Protestant Reformation, the predominant work-related theme among theologians has been the concept of work as a calling—specifically, the doctrine of vocation, a term that comes from the Latin word for “calling.”⁵⁶ This doctrine comes into prominence of necessity, addressing the interplay between the Reformation emphasis on the priesthood of all believers and the non-clerical pursuits of ordinary workers. As a doctrine, vocation recognizes God’s creative activity in the formation of every person, encouraging “attention to each individual’s uniqueness, talents, and personality. These are valued as gifts from God, who creates and equips each person in a different way for the calling He has in mind for that person’s life.”⁵⁷ Bezalel, Oholiab, and all the skilled workers referenced in Exodus 31

⁵⁵ Wilf Hildebrandt, *An Old Testament Theology of the Spirit of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 107.

⁵⁶ Veith, Jr., *God at Work*, 17.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

function in the context of vocation, operating in the gifts of God, working on tasks that carry spiritual significance specifically because God ordained them.

In this way, the doctrine of vocation sacralizes even the most ordinary and mundane work. Rather than “make everyone into church workers; ... it turn[s] every kind of work into a sacred calling.”⁵⁸ Vocation recognizes that God continues to act creatively in His world through the various gifts and calls He extends to those He creates. As a result, even given humanity’s broken relationship with God and resultant expulsion from the Garden of Eden, through vocation people continue on some level to function in authority over the earth as God’s representatives, carrying out His creative work. “God did not exhaust creativity in the first week of the world,” Fretheim asserts. “God continues to create and uses creatures in a vocation that involves the becoming of creation.”⁵⁹ Through vocation, then, believers continue God’s creative act.

Moreover, Spirit-empowered workers pursue their vocations in keeping with God’s unique design for them, recognizing that God holds the highest authority and, with it, freedom to direct the paths of His followers as He sees fit. They acknowledge that certain things are beyond understanding and even knowing. They present themselves as “living sacrifices” (Rom. 12:1), submitting themselves for God’s use as He made them, believing that He wisely and purposely “formed them in the womb” (Jer. 1:5). In doing so, they recognize the limitations inherent in human wisdom and seek to capitalize on the gifts and abilities they have received to the glory of God. “Human beings were intended to work, and not just to do any kind of work, but to do good works, doing them in accord with the way we

⁵⁸ Ibid., 19.

⁵⁹ Terence E. Fretheim, *Creation Untamed: The Bible, God, and Natural Disasters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 15.

have been fashioned, the abilities we have been given, and therefore the vocations for which we are best suited.”⁶⁰ Through vocation, then, believers rest in God’s unique design.

Some contemporary thinkers, however, suggest the historical doctrine of vocation hints too strongly of resignation or even fatalism. Jensen identifies one such limitation, arguing that “the language may exhibit socially conservative tendencies that encourage one to stay in one’s place. [But] if we are to claim that God calls persons uniquely,” he counters, “then we must also recognize that the human propensity for order may obstruct the transformative call of God’s grace.”⁶¹ Witherington distinguishes between calling and vocation, suggesting that “call is the divine initiative. Vocation happens when we respond to the call.”⁶² Volf goes further, arguing that Martin Luther’s understanding of work as vocation remains (1) indifferent toward alienation in work, (2) dangerously ambiguous in defining “calling,” (3) easily misused ideologically to ennoble dehumanizing work rather than improve working conditions and systems of employment, (4) not applicable to increasingly mobile industrial and information-based societies, (5) not applicable to the variety of jobs, work schedules, and career field changes that characterize contemporary employment, and (6) deficient in reducing vocation to employment, inadvertently elevating work to the status of religion. “The religious pursuit of work,” he writes, “plays havoc with the working individual, his fellow human beings, and nature.”⁶³

⁶⁰ Witherington, 7.

⁶¹ Jensen, 37.

⁶² Witherington, 68.

⁶³ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 107-109.

Acknowledging the limits of the concept of vocation, however, does not eliminate its usefulness altogether. Through vocation, believers discover a means for continuing the creative work of God by utilizing the strengths and skills inherent in God's unique design of them. Thus, they partner with Him toward the fulfillment of His divine purpose. This divine connection remains especially significant in a culture that often limits the purpose of work to little more than securing a paycheck. "The whole attitude of culture," Witherington laments, "has been changed from our being truth seekers to being job seekers."⁶⁴ A quick glimpse at contemporary culture, where a simple phrase like "Thank God It's Friday" resonates with so many, affirms that reality. However, "work which has no other incentive than the pay check is closer to slavery than it is freedom."⁶⁵ Vocation offers a different perspective, one where each worker sees his or her task as a holy calling. Ultimately, an understanding of vocation elevates the status of work to align it with God's intent in forming humanity: co-regency with Him over all the earth.

The doctrine of vocation, then, reflects the experience of Bezalel, Oholiab, and their co-workers in Exodus 31. Vocation fills otherwise ordinary labor with significance and sheds light on understanding work as God's gift. Vocational work continues God's commitment to forming and filling a shapeless and empty world as in the beginning. God's calling helps the individual identify and engage in his or her particular role in partnership with God and as part of God's master plan for the advancement of His creation.

⁶⁴ Witherington, 49.

⁶⁵ Trueblood, 62.

Rooted in Bounty

Abundance characterizes Spirit-empowered work. Filled with the Spirit of God, Bezalel receives wisdom, understanding, knowledge and “all kinds of skills” (Exod. 31:3), including the ability “to engage in all kinds of crafts” (v. 4). God gives Bezalel an assistant, Oholiab, and provides “ability to all the skilled workers to make everything” He had commanded (v. 6). Exodus 36 describes every worker as “willing to come and do the work” (36:2). R. Paul Stevens explains here that “the Hebrew literally means that their hearts were *lifted up* to become involved in this work”⁶⁶ (emphasis added)—the language of abundance. Moreover, all of this takes place in the context of such generous giving on the part of God’s people that Moses must instruct the people to stop bringing offerings for the building of the Tabernacle “because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work” (36:7).

Such abundance exists repeatedly in Scripture where the Spirit of God reigns. In the creation account, Adam receives “every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it” (Gen. 1:29).⁶⁷ Following the flood, Noah hears, “Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything” (9:3). Abram’s conversation with God includes this promise: “Look around All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever” (13:14-15). When Jesus feeds five-thousand with five loaves and two fishes (Mark 6:34-44), twelve baskets remain leftover. In Acts, because of the generosity of the followers of Christ, “there were no needy persons among them” (Acts 4:34). The New

⁶⁶ R. Paul Stevens, *Doing God’s Business: Meaning and Motivation for the Marketplace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006), 178.

⁶⁷ David Doty describes this as “Edenic abundance” and declares that it “will become reality again in the Messianic Kingdom, putting economic deprivation forever to rest as streams burst forth in the desert (Isa 35:6)”. Cf. David B. Doty, *Eden’s Bridge: The Marketplace in Creation and Mission* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 12.

Jerusalem of Revelation 21 is marked by such abundance that “the nations ... walk by its light and the kings of the earth ... bring their splendor into it” (Rev. 21:24).

All this reflects and flows from the nature of God himself. God acts on creation’s behalf not because lack requires it, but because bounty compels it. Ephesians 2, for example, describes God as “rich in mercy” (Eph. 2:4) and further identifies God’s abundance as the motivation behind His redemptive activity. Specifically, “because of his great love for us,” Paul writes, “God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ” (vv. 4-5). In other words, although humanity certainly stands in need before God, His actions toward His creation do not flow out of their need but out of His greatness. Even within the Trinity itself, perichoresis exists not because Father, Son, or Holy Spirit lacks in any way but because each abounds in every way. Additionally, as Jensen observes, “the divine persons are what they are only within this eternal relationship”⁶⁸ This intrinsic abundance within the Godhead results in generosity toward human beings, as God “shares creativity and power with those he works with, choosing to work in community.”⁶⁹ The Apostle John affirms this when he writes, “From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another” (John 1:16).

Presupposing that out of and because of His abundance God has supplied everything needed allows for a generosity regarding work and its fruits that corresponds, then, to God’s generosity of grace toward us. As Jensen observes, “Whereas current patterns of work imply scarcity and competition, the divine work operates out of abundance, generosity, and freedom.”⁷⁰ When confidence rests in God’s abundance, work becomes God’s gift to

⁶⁸ Jensen, 58.

⁶⁹ Witherington, 7.

⁷⁰ Jensen, 49.

generously share not a commodity to battle over. Resources become evidences of God’s grace to utilize for the benefit of the whole, not possessions to hoard. By implication, enough wealth-creating work exists within the realm of God’s creation to engage gainfully all willing people. Enough divine abundance exists to supply every need.

Current economic presumptions generally assume limitations, not sufficiency. A scarcity mindset, however, impacts the human thought process negatively, leaving people preoccupied with what they do not have and minimizing their capacity for fruitful decisions regarding what they do have. In their recent book, Sendhil Mullainathan and Eldar Shafir examine how even the perception of scarcity captures the mind and restricts human perception. Concern over insufficiency, whether genuine or only imagined, left subjects robbed of “cognitive capacity and executive control”⁷¹—essentially, the mental ability and human willpower required for productive assessment and action.

By contrast, presupposing the abundance and generosity of God leads to different conclusions not only about the nature and purpose of work but also about broader economic realities. As Jensen explains, “What differentiates reigning economic assumptions from their ecclesial counterparts is that sharing in the former is needed as an exigency amid scarcity. In the church’s economy, however, the world already has all it needs, and the desire is that all should participate in fullness.”⁷² Knowledge of that fullness—the fullness of the triune God who created and redeems all that exists—must transform humanity’s understanding of work into God’s grace-based and sufficient gift.

⁷¹ Sendhil Mullainathan and Eldar Shafir, *Scarcity: Why Having Too Little Means So Much* (New York: Times Books, 2013), 60.

⁷² Jensen, 7.

Part of the challenge lies in the believer's inclination to limit the effective sphere of the grace of God. Quoting A. I. C. Heron, Volf suggests that most Protestant theology has been "inclined to restrict the activity of the Spirit to the spiritual, psychological, moral or religious life of the individual."⁷³ Volf expounds, suggesting, "first, the activity of the Spirit was limited to the sphere of salvation, and second, the *locus* of the present realization of salvation was limited to the human spirit."⁷⁴ The Scriptures paint a different picture, suggesting that the activity of the Spirit is not bound to such limitations and, indeed, has liberty to engage the whole person and the entire world, including every laborer's task and every economic system extant on the planet.

Expressed in Community

When people see lack and deficiency as abnormal and, instead, see gracious supply from a generous God as typical, relational paradigms shift, as well. Rapport replaces rivalry and interaction supplants isolation. Where resources are more than adequate, others become partners, not competitors. As Jensen asserts, "The divine economy underscores primacy of relation and the priority of persons over labor."⁷⁵ This prioritizing of relationships moves people toward alignment with the Trinitarian reality in which Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist in eternally harmonious relationship. Equally, this reflects the warm invitation Jesus extended to weary laborers: "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). Indeed, Jesus calls His closest disciples first into relationship—

⁷³ Alasdair I. C. Heron, *The Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit in the Bible, the History of Christian Thought, and Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 154.

⁷⁴ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 102.

⁷⁵ Jensen, 57.

“that they might be with him”—and only after that toward productivity—“that he might send them out to preach and have power to cast out demons” (Mark 3:14-15).

The Trinitarian Godhead’s example of and invitation to the prioritization of relationship stands in stark contrast to the overarching emphasis on individualism in contemporary culture. People obsess over individual rights and individual preferences. But “in the process of individualization,” writes Witherington, “we lost contact with the biblical notion of collective personality—that is, how we get our true identity through the group we belong to, in this case, the body of Christ.”⁷⁶ Michael Matheson Miller agrees, shattering the myth of the isolated individual by announcing “there is no such thing as individuals.”⁷⁷ Further reflection suggests this is not far from the truth. Humans have identity not in isolation but only in relationship, as no one exists apart from relationship. From the moment of conception, every person is “son” or “daughter”—a statement of relationship. The same stands true for Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who eternally exist only in relationship with one another. Because of this, stresses Greg Forster, “we need to see the work of everyone around us and understand the vast cultural system of economic exchange through which we all serve one another as independent co-stewards.”⁷⁸ Apart from such an understanding, human labor lacks the relational context God intends.

Biblical work, then, which with the appearing of Jesus becomes more specifically the work of the kingdom of God, is characteristically shared labor that grows from God’s

⁷⁶ Witherington, 24.

⁷⁷ Michael Matheson Miller, “A Christian Vision of Government,” Lecture, Acton University, (Grand Rapids, MI: June 13, 2012).

⁷⁸ Greg Forster, “Theology That Works: Making Disciples Who Practice Fruitful Work and Economic Wisdom in Modern America,” *The Oikonomia Network* (August 5, 2013), 12.

abundance. God models this from the beginning, “shar[ing] creativity and power with those he works with, choosing to work in community, from the dawn of Creation when he says, ‘Let *us* make man ...’ and on an ongoing basis ever since.”⁷⁹ Shared labor characterizes all truly biblical labor.

Moreover, Scripture presents shared prosperity—generosity—as a primary motivation behind biblical work. Paul instructs the Ephesian believers, for example, that “he who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need” (Eph. 4:28). Notice that Paul intends not simply for believers to live within the law, or even be gainfully employed, but that they practice both those disciplines so that they might also practice generosity. The New Testament strongly and repeatedly encourages generosity, particularly toward the needy.⁸⁰

Generosity, then, reflects the heart of God while testifying to God’s intent behind work. It stands in stark contrast to the spirit of this age where “consumption has become the stimulus for work. In a society that prizes acquisition, consumption, and disposable commodities, work is not valued in itself, but because work creates the means for devouring more products.”⁸¹ Biblical work recognizes the need to provide for one’s family (1 Tim. 5:8), but also embraces God’s heart for those in need, aware of the abundance that marks the character of God.

This sense of partnership and community in human work stretches beyond relationship with God and relationship with others to include the whole of “non-human

⁷⁹ Witherington, 7.

⁸⁰ See, for example, Romans 12:13, 2 Corinthians 8:14, Hebrews 13:16, and 1 Timothy 6:18.

⁸¹ Jensen, 13.

creation.”⁸² Humanity is created “from the earth,” anticipating their inherent connection with labor, but also “in the image of God,” clarifying that their identity grows out of relationship with the One who formed them. “It is not just that we work on the earth or in the earth; it is that we work with the earth, and as our home and habitat we need to treat it with respect. . . . Dust we are, and to dust we shall return.”⁸³ Rightly understood, the communal quality of human labor stretches to include all non-human creation, also.

The implications of such an understanding run deep, suggesting that every time a mechanic turns a wrench or a waitress delivers a meal, every time a surgeon makes an incision or a CEO makes a decision, that worker does so in response to and as an expression of the abounding grace of God, not in isolation, but in partnership—with God, with others, and with the world itself.

Fueled By Anticipation

A biblical understanding of work, then, grounds work in the goodness of creation, informs work through the practice of Sabbath rest, and accomplishes work in the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. A fully Pentecostal understanding of work, however, also celebrates work as both a present and anticipatory expression of the eschatological reign of Christ. Biblically, the Spirit-empowered believer works in cooperation with God toward God’s consummative act as declared in Revelation. Properly understood, then, humanity’s relationship to work stands rooted in the past activity of creation and the present reality of redemption. But the panoramic significance of work remains incomplete without considering the connection between work and God’s Kingdom both present and coming.

⁸² This useful terminology appears repeatedly in Volf.

⁸³ Witherington, 17.

Living the Future Now

From the moment sin fractured the world in the Garden of Eden, anticipation of the world's healing began. Beginning with the blood sacrifice required in order to supply Adam and Eve with "garments of skin" (Gen. 3:21) extending to the blood sacrifices demanded of Israel's covenant, God repeatedly foreshadowed an altogether righteous sacrifice capable of making humanity whole. Likewise, from the warning to the serpent regarding one of Eve's descendants—"He will crush your head" (v. 15)—to the multiple prophetic declarations promising a righteous Kingdom ruled by a righteous king,⁸⁴ God made clear His commitment to restore not just broken people but broken creation.

God's plan for creation's redemption advances powerfully through the ministry of Christ. Fulfilling God's prophetic promises, Jesus evidences through His ministry heaven's invasion of this earthly realm. He draws to himself disciples who share His mission, teaching them to pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10) and to work for the same. Ultimately, following His death, resurrection, and exaltation, that same eternal Spirit by which Jesus ministered is generously poured out on all flesh, and the age to come continues its aggressive invasion of this present age. Life becomes, for a rapidly expanding number of redeemed people, a present experience of eternal realities. "The unprecedented aspect of Jesus' understanding of the Kingdom," writes Graham Cray, "was that the future rule of God was in some sense present now."⁸⁵

⁸⁴ e.g., Isaiah 9:6, Micah 5:2, Zechariah 9:9.

⁸⁵ Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, *Mission as Transformation: A Theology of the Whole Gospel*, reprint ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 28.

Jesus' resurrection serves as "an anticipation of the new creation [with] eschatological consequences for the new heavens and the new earth."⁸⁶ The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost shatters the barrier between "this age" and "the age to come."⁸⁷ Eternity now continuously invades time through the ongoing activity of the Holy Spirit in the earth. Indeed, as "a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession" (Eph. 1:14), the activity of the Holy Spirit is, by definition, eschatological—offering a present expression of a promised future. Spirit empowered believers live the future now.

All of this powerfully impacts a Christian understanding of the role and significance of work. Indeed, for Volf, no more significant factor exists. "At its core," he writes, "Christian faith is eschatological. Christian life is life in the Spirit of the new creation or it is not Christian life at all. . . . Christian work must, therefore, be done under the inspiration of the Spirit and in light of the coming new creation."⁸⁸ Although work may be intrinsic to human nature by virtue of humanity's creation in the image of God and transformed into something bountiful and communal through humanity's redemption by the grace of God, the most compelling characteristic of truly biblical work now emerges as its eschatological character imputed by the Spirit of God.

⁸⁶ Shawn Bawulski and James Watkins, "Possible Worlds and God's Creative Process: How a Classical Doctrine of Divine Creation Can Understand Divine Creativity," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 65, no. 02 (2012): 190.

⁸⁷ Steven Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 58-61.

⁸⁸ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 79.

Striving for His Kingdom Come

For Volf, God’s coming Kingdom establishes the pattern toward which all Christian activity must aim. Concern for current realities holds significance primarily in terms of its contrast with future realities as promised in Christ and the new creation. Articulating these contrasts provides the foundation for understanding the goal of Christian service. The purpose behind any theology of work, indeed behind work itself, must stand as “ever greater correspondence with the coming new creation.”⁸⁹

Amy Sherman develops this theme at length, declaring that “the consummated kingdom is marked by two major, closely related features: justice and shalom.”⁹⁰ Justice, for Sherman, breaks down into rescue, equity, and restoration. “The justice of God,” she writes, “is all about restoring wholeness in relationships—with God and with other human beings.”⁹¹ Shalom finds expression in four quadrants of peace: peace with God, self, others, and creation.

These two qualities of justice and shalom provide a basic framework for Christian labor. Such efforts often falter, however, when Christians (1) understand the gospel too narrowly, concentrating on the individual and the past; (2) understand heaven too inadequately, divorcing eternity from the here and now; (3) lack accountability regarding the implementation of personal faith; and (4) live in a homogenous culture, insulated from other social classes and ethnicities.⁹² Sherman warns the Church not to “shrinkwrap the kingdom

⁸⁹ Ibid., 82.

⁹⁰ Amy L. Sherman, *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 28.

⁹¹ Ibid., 32.

⁹² Ibid., 70-74.

down to this limited scope of activity.”⁹³ “If anything,” she writes, “this gospel is about heaven coming to earth, not us going to heaven.”⁹⁴

N. T. Wright sheds further light on the conversation with his challenge toward “imagining the Kingdom.”⁹⁵ Wright argues that biblical scholarship has historically failed to see the story of Jesus as “the *continuation* and *climax* of the ancient story of Israel.”⁹⁶ The Gospels, he suggests, stand in contrast to the contemporary narrative of the rise of Augustus, the Roman emperor, and declare “how Israel’s God becomes king of the whole world.”⁹⁷ Unlike a gospel, then, in which “the purpose of the whole thing is ‘to go to heaven when you die,’”⁹⁸ the biblical Gospels invite us to imagine “the kingdom of God on earth as in heaven and [work] for that end.”⁹⁹

Perhaps Paul’s words in Colossians 3:22-24 provide the most directly illuminating New Testament passage regarding the eschatological character of work. Collectively, Colossians 3:18-4:1 expound on Paul’s previous exhortation that the believer should put both heart and mind on things above (Col. 3:1, 2), put to death that which belongs to the earthly nature (v. 5), and live as one who has “put on the new self, which is being renewed in

⁹³ Ibid., 12.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 84.

⁹⁵ N. T. Wright, “Imagining the Kingdom: Mission and Theology in Early Christianity,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 65, no. 04 (2012), 401.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 383.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 387.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 396.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

knowledge in the image of its Creator” (v. 10). Colossians 3:18 through 4:1 ultimately extrapolates what it means to “do ... all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (v. 3:17).

Martin Luther described Colossians 3:18-4:1 as a *Haustafel*, meaning “a list of rules for the household.”¹⁰⁰ The list defines the ethical responsibilities relative to various positions within a domestic unit. In each case, the passage identifies the party being addressed, commands a certain course of action, and provides a motivating statement for the specified behavior.¹⁰¹ The structure suggests a “literary independence”¹⁰² from both what precedes and what follows it. Indeed, some scholars suggest the verses addressing wives and husbands and children and parents reflect roots in pre-Christian ethical instruction. O’Brien, however, argues that verses 22-24 appear unique to Paul. “Even those commentators who have asserted most forcefully that Paul took over and Christianized material from Hellenism or Hellenistic Judaism in the household tables concede that [the injunctions given slaves and masters] have been newly formulated as specifically Christian instructions.”¹⁰³

Given that slaves constituted as much as one-half the population of the Roman Empire,¹⁰⁴ Paul may have developed and included this material at this point in hopes of diffusing any concern from outside Christianity over the threat of social upheaval inherent in

¹⁰⁰ Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary 44 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 214.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 215.

¹⁰² David Hay, *Colossians*, Abingdon New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 137.

¹⁰³ O’Brien, 226.

¹⁰⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon: The Supremacy of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1989), 129.

the pronouncement of equality made in 3:11.¹⁰⁵ Still, part of the assurance of Colossians 3:22-24 as distinctly Christian instruction grows from the status given slaves by the passage.

“Contemporary non-Christian writings, both pagan and Jewish, do not ordinarily address, or refer to, slaves as morally responsible persons.”¹⁰⁶ Indeed, the contemporary culture made no distinction between slaves and any other piece of production equipment. “The Roman Varro classified farm implements into three classes: the articulate, the inarticulate, and the mute—the articulate being slaves.”¹⁰⁷ Paul erases such distinctions and affirms strongly the equality of all humanity in Christ.

Equality brings responsibility, however. In contrast to earlier codes that may have contributed to what Paul has written, he treats each individual as a responsible moral agent in his or her own right.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, Angela Standhartinger argues that *isotes* (fair) in 4:1 serves as an “interpretive key to reading the [household] code”¹⁰⁹ and is designed to ultimately undermine the “unambiguously oppressive ethics”¹¹⁰ reflected in 3:18-4:1. Susan Henderson’s language uses less inflammatory language, suggesting that the author

¹⁰⁵ Hay, 148.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹⁰⁷ Hughes, 129.

¹⁰⁸ Andrew T. Lincoln, “The Household Code and Wisdom Mode of Colossians,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 21, no. 74 (October 1999): 101.

¹⁰⁹ Angela Standhartinger and Brian McNeil, “The Origin and Intention of the Household Code in the Letter to the Colossians,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, no. 79 (September 1, 2000): 99.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 130.

encourages the Colossians to “transform [existing cultural] values by means of the distinctive ‘grace’ that derives from new life in Christ.”¹¹¹

Significantly in regard to work, the passage frames human labor in uniquely Christian parameters, even labor offered under the most distressing circumstances. Although Paul directs these words of exhortation to slaves, the principles revealed remain pertinent today. Indeed, these words may hold particular significance for the contemporary blue-collar or pink-collar worker whose employment obligations provide limited opportunity for any kind of autonomy or self-direction on the job. Paul writes:

Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven (Col. 3:22-4:1).

Colossians 3:22 exhorts slaves to “obey ... earthly masters in everything.” The phrase “earthly masters” translates *kata sarxa* and hints that some other “Master” may be involved. Paul warns against “eye-service” only, using *ophthalmodoulia*, a word found here for the first time in Greek literature and perhaps a word coined by Paul himself.¹¹² Paul invites, instead, labor offered with “sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord” (Col. 3:22). “Sincerity of heart” (*haplotes kardias*) reflects “a singleness of intention, a focus of purpose,

¹¹¹ Suzanne Watts Henderson, “Taking Liberties with the Text: The Colossians Household Code as Hermeneutical Paradigm,” *Interpretation* 60, no. 4 (October 1, 2006): 429.

¹¹² Philip W. Comfort and Peter H. Davids, *Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philemon*, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), 293.

springing from the center of motivation and concern.”¹¹³ Such intentionality should couple with “reverence for the Lord,” an emphasis reminiscent of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament.

The eschatological character of Paul’s exhortation comes to the forefront in Colossians 3:23 where Paul promises sincere, reverent, full-hearted laborers “an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.” “Inheritance” translates *kleronomias*, a word appearing fourteen times in the New Testament. More than just the forgiveness experienced at salvation,¹¹⁴ the word carries eschatological dimensions, ultimately connecting God’s redemptive action with “future fulfillment at the end of time.”¹¹⁵ Scholars disagree on the voice of the final sentence: although, as above, many translate in the indicative voice, others argue for the imperative, “Serve the Lord Christ.” The voice of the latter matches the previous imperative for “work” and may align better with the section’s concluding verse: “Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favoritism” (Col. 3:25), especially with the inclusion of the debated textual variant *gar*.¹¹⁶

Any biblical perspective on human work must embrace this scriptural promise of an inheritance from Christ. Certainly, the first-century slave “could expect neither ‘recompense nor inheritance’”¹¹⁷ for labor diligently offered. Indeed, in other New Testament passages,

¹¹³ James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 254.

¹¹⁴ Cf. René López, “A Study of Pauline Passages on Inheriting the Kingdom,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168, no. 672 (October 1, 2011): 443–459.

¹¹⁵ Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 300.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Murray J. Harris, *Colossians & Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991).

¹¹⁷ E. Glenn Hinson, “Christian Household in Colossians 3:18-4:1,” *Review & Expositor* 70, no. 4 (September 1, 1973): 504.

the Scriptures highlight the lack of any standing on the part of the slave.¹¹⁸ In Colossians 3:24-25, however, the Christ-pleasing laborer is assured both that “the Lord would take care of any indignities suffered in the role imposed upon him [and that] in the Kingdom he could expect the same lot as his master, the eternal ‘inheritance.’”¹¹⁹

“Working for the Lord” (Col. 3:23) certainly involves exhibiting the kind of character qualities that Paul describes in the preceding section of Scripture, Colossians 3:1-17. The eschatological promise of Colossians 3:24, however, stretches the implications for biblical work beyond those desirable traits to include an understanding of human labor as a means of anticipating and expressing God’s coming Kingdom in the here and now. “With this ‘new creation’ orientation, work becomes a type of eschatological mandate rather than simply a creation mandate.”¹²⁰ Biblical work anticipates and strives toward the realization of the Kingdom of heaven on earth. “Work ... from a Christian perspective, is not just viewed in light of the original creation order, much less in light of the Fall. It is primarily viewed in the light of the Christ event, and it looks forward to the completion of that event when Christ returns.”¹²¹ Colossians 3:22-4:1 expands the timeline of work’s significance from creation’s beginnings forward into eternity yet to come.

¹¹⁸ S. Lewis Johnson, “Studies in the Epistle to the Colossians. XI, The New Man in the Old Relationships,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 121, no. 482 (April 1, 1964): 114.

¹¹⁹ Hinson, 504.

¹²⁰ Darrell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 46.

¹²¹ Witherington, 85.

Expecting Eternal Results

For some, an eschatological concept of work raises questions of the validity of such work, and specifically whether any benefit accrues from such work given the brokenness of this world until the return of Christ. A common Christian understanding presumes the annihilation of this world, although not the annihilation of its human inhabitants, and the eternal experience of “a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13). Indeed, the Apostle Peter declares, “the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare” (v. 10). Taken alone, these verses suggest that “since everything will be destroyed in this way” (v. 11), investment in advancing the Kingdom of heaven on earth results in only temporary impact at best.¹²²

Without detracting from the return of Christ or the ultimate destruction of that built with “wood, hay, or straw” (1 Cor. 3:12), Volf argues that the liberation of creation, as described in Romans 8:21, “cannot occur through its destruction but only through its transformation.”¹²³ The continuity evident in the pre- and post-resurrection appearances of Jesus provides a biblical precedent. “As the resurrection of Christ shows,” says Volf, “... the new creation is a reaffirmation of the first.”¹²⁴ The way in which the resurrection body of Christ ties to the natural body of Christ suggests something about how the liberated creation

¹²² With regard to 2 Pet. 3:10 particularly, see the footnote summarizing significant textual and interpretive discussion on the final phrase of verse 10, concluding in favor of the textual variant *heurethesetai* (“will be exposed”) over *katakaesetai* (“will be burned up”) in *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 2422-2423.

¹²³ Miroslav Volf, “On Loving with Hope: Eschatology and Social Responsibility,” *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 7 (July 9, 1990): 29.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

ties to the historical creation. “The resurrection body demands a corresponding, glorified but nevertheless material, environment.”¹²⁵

This understanding of redeemed humanity’s eternal experience as something earthy and palpable challenges much conventional thought. However, as Andrew Shepherd declares, “Paul’s understanding of the ‘gospel’ could not be further removed from the appalling belief held by many Christians that creation will be destroyed by God and that our eternal future consists of some sort of disembodied state with other souls in a place called ‘heaven.’”¹²⁶ Indeed, the creation account itself demands something different. The “concept of human holiness,” writes Carol Wiseman, “has its origins in creation. God is holy; therefore all that He created was holy.”¹²⁷ Christians should reexamine their presumptions regarding the eternal destiny of God’s once-entirely-holy creation in view of Christ’s resurrection and the biblical promise of creation’s liberation.

When believers integrate the liberation of creation itself and the resurrection of their own bodies into their understanding of life eternal, present Kingdom-advancing labors take on entirely new dimensions. Murray Dempster describes such efforts as “kingdom-signifying deeds of anticipatory transformation” and declares that these “are the kinds of human effort that God preserves, sanctifies and directs teleologically toward the future age of God’s redemptive reign.”¹²⁸ Today’s work holds rich potential for bearing fruit of eternal value.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 29.

¹²⁶ Andrew Shepherd, “Creation and Christology: The Ecological Crisis and Eschatological Ethics,” *Stimulus: The New Zealand Journal of Christian Thought & Practice* 18, no. 4 (November 2010): 55.

¹²⁷ Carol Wiseman, “Eschatological Holiness: A Pentecostal Call to Global Responsibility, Obligation and Power and Responsibility of the Church” (paper presented at the annual conference of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Lakeland, FL, March 14-16, 2002), 305.

¹²⁸ Murray Dempster, “Christian Social Concern in Pentecostal Perspective” (presented at the Conference of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Lakeland, FL, 1991), 36.

Indeed, biblical texts promise a rich and eternal prize specifically as a reward for diligent earthly labor. The Parable of the Talents stands as a prime example. The servant who did no work in his master's absence finds himself cast into outer darkness. "In that place," Jesus says, "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 25:30). But those servants who labored faithfully and fruitfully find abundant reward: "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master" (Matt. 25:21, 23). The Apostle Paul anticipates such a reward, declaring, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Tim 4:7-8). Finally, John echoes this theme in Revelation, where "the one who is victorious and does my [Jesus'] will to the end" (Rev. 2:26) is promised authority over the nations—a promise reflected in the repeated references to the new role of the redeemed as kings and priests (5:10; 20:6; 22:5).

Fundamentally, then, "all present activity is a convergence of creation and hope, integrating the creation order with the perfect order of the age to come."¹²⁹ An eschatological perspective on work recognizes that believers live the future now and rightly strive to work in such a way that advances God's heavenly Kingdom on the earth, confident of results that will endure on that day when God's consuming "fire will test the quality of each man's work" (1 Cor. 3:13).

¹²⁹ Charlie Self, *Flourishing Churches and Communities: A Pentecostal Primer on Faith, Work, and Economics for Spirit-Empowered Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian's Library Press, 2013).

Conclusion

The Scriptures stand replete with insight for the contemporary worker. Work is no curse but rather God's gift. Humanity's propensity for work reflects creation in the image of God. Rest provides a necessary balance to work, challenging the worker to find his or her identity not in labor or labor's results but in the finished work of Christ. Work and its products are not commodities to fight over but gifts from an abundant God to share in community as graciously as He has shared himself with humanity. Indeed, beyond salvation He has gifted and enabled every human in order that His creative acts might continue to unfold through humanity as part of His plan for eternity. All of this expresses and anticipates that future day when the Father brings "all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (Eph. 1:10), and a redeemed humanity participates in "a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells" (2 Pet. 3:13).

CHAPTER 3: CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This project exists to develop materials and processes enabling the blue-collar and pink-collar¹ worker to integrate more effectively personal Christian faith into the daily challenges of work. This requires not only a biblical theology of work as outlined in chapter 2, but likewise a definition for and understanding of the blue-collar worker, a knowledge of the historical development of the blue-collar labor sector, an awareness of both historical and current efforts toward integrating faith and work for the employed non-professional, and a working knowledge of the current best practices in facilitating marketplace ministry. This chapter will examine these topics, focusing on the themes and emphases of current related literature.

The Challenge of Defining the “Blue-Collar” Worker

Traditionally, three key variables define blue-collar work: physical labor, an hourly rate of pay, and limited educational requirements. Usually, blue-collar jobs stand in contrast to white-collar employment—jobs normally characterized by a focus on mental acumen, a salaried compensation structure, and specific requirements regarding higher levels of formal education. For their categories, The U.S. Department of Labor groups blue-collar and service

¹ Blue-collar type jobs more typically held by female workers are sometimes described as pink-collar jobs. For sake of clarity and readability, this study will utilize the label “blue-collar” or “working-class” with no exclusion of pink-collar work or workers intended. Additionally, all observations assume an American, and specifically United States, context.

occupations together, specifying blue-collar employment as work in “precision production, craft, and repair occupations; machine operators and inspectors; transportation and moving occupations; handlers, equipment cleaners, helpers, and laborers; and service occupations.”² Within the relevant literature, the term “blue-collar” appears somewhat more loosely applied and even often used interchangeably with the label “working-class.” This study will focus on these kinds of jobs and workers.

Although entrepreneurial blue-collar workers exist, the majority function in the employ of others, often with limited workplace autonomy. Much of the current marketplace ministry material addresses the white-collar environment generally and executive-level jobs and entrepreneurial business owners specifically. Such individuals often have liberty to offer significant direction to their businesses in view of Kingdom priorities. The blue-collar worker, by contrast, generally punches a time card and accomplishes the tasks assigned to him or her by someone else. “Decision latitude”³ appears rare. This study will consider particularly the unique parameters of market-place ministry for the employee with limited workplace autonomy.

The use of *pink-collar* as a label for labor-intensive work typically done by women originated during World War II but ultimately gained popularity via Louise Kapp Howe’s 1977 book *Pink Collar Workers: Inside the World of Women’s Work*.⁴ Howe adopted the

² *BLS Glossary*, s.v. “blue-collar and service occupation,” accessed August 10, 2014, <http://www.bls.gov/bls/glossary.htm#B>.

³ Leigh Ann Simmons and Jennifer E. Swanberg, “Psychosocial Work Environment and Depressive Symptoms among US Workers: Comparing Working Poor and Working Non-Poor,” *Social Psychiatry & Psychiatric Epidemiology* 44, no. 8 (August 2009): 629.

⁴ Louise Kapp Howe, *Pink Collar Workers: Inside the World of Women’s Work* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1977).

nomenclature in her argument for women's equality within the workplace. More recently, the designation speaks without prejudice of any non-professional job predominantly held by women.⁵

An Historical Context for Current Realities

Historically, the distinction between blue- and white-collar workers finds its roots in the transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy and, more significantly, in the corresponding implementation of mass production techniques. The work of Frederick Taylor helped both create and define this line of demarcation between the two labor categories. In the early twentieth century, Taylor conducted time-motion studies of factory workers to determine “exactly what they did, how they did it, and how they could do it faster.”⁶ Eventually, through Taylor's analysis, workers' jobs were broken down into simple and separate tasks, and they received only one or two tasks to do, over and over again. The division of labor began.

Specialized but monotonous work assignments resulted from Taylor's analysis, all eventually as part of a larger mass-production process. Managers were expected to think and workers were expected to labor. Indeed, Taylor designed the assigned tasks to require as little thought as possible, famously telling a congressional committee in 1912 that “the science of handling pig-iron is so great that the man who is ... physically able to handle pig-iron and is sufficiently phlegmatic and stupid to choose this for his occupation is rarely able to

⁵ In a recent *US News and World Report* article, however, David Francis reports that “this decade, nearly one-third of job-seeking males will fill positions in industries where 70 percent of the workforce has been female.” David Francis, “The Pink-Collar Job Boom,” *US News & World Report*, accessed August 7, 2014, <http://money.usnews.com/money/careers/articles/2012/09/10/the-pink-collar-job-boom>.

⁶ David Kusnet, *Love the Work, Hate the Job: Why America's Best Workers Are Unhappier Than Ever*, 1st ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2008), 36.

comprehend the science of handling pig-iron.”⁷ Clearly, brawn trumped brains for the tasks Taylor identified. In such a context, the utilitarian nature of employment evoked the label “factory hands,”⁸ as if no other part of the employee mattered and laborers were as interchangeable as wrenches and lunch pails.

The labor-intensive nature of such work meant employees wore more industrial-friendly attire—durable canvas or cotton clothing in darker colors that would hide dirt and grime and hold up better to wear and tear. White-collar workers, typically working in office environments with no call for physical on-the-job exertion or reason to think they might get their hands dirty or clothing soiled during working hours, dressed in white or in lighter and more colorful garb. While never a hard and fast rule, the dissimilarity in workplace apparel both led to the terminology and solidified in the American psyche the division between those who work with their minds and those who work with their hands.

In reality, distinctions in the current blue-collar environment have blurred. Many stereotypical presumptions regarding blue-collar employment match current realities. For example, in spite of computerization and automation, blue-collar work often still involves significant manual labor. As was true a century ago, workers continue to cluster toward the lower socioeconomic classes. In spite of waning union influence nationally, many blue-collar workers still proudly carry membership cards and value their union connections highly.

Not everything remains unchanged, however. Today, work regularly consists of something other than simple and repetitive assembly-line tasks. “Now,” reports David

⁷ David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 33.

⁸ Janet Zandy notes that reducing a person to nothing more than the utility of his or her hands dates back at least as far as the seventeenth century. See Janet Zandy, *Hands: Physical Labor, Class, and Cultural Work* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), xii.

Francis, “manufacturing jobs require—at the very least—familiarity with technology, advanced math, and computer skills.”⁹ New materials and processes demand specialized and advanced training, although not necessarily in the form of a college degree. “The new economy,” explains David Kusnet, “is creating a new kind of skilled worker, with expertise in emerging technologies and vast opportunities for advancement but usually without a degree from a four-year college”¹⁰ Ralph Whitehead describes these laborers as “new collar workers,”¹¹ while Tom Janowski labels them “semi-engineers.”¹² These technically challenging job opportunities continue to expand. For blue-collar workers, employment looks appreciably different heading into the twenty-first century.

Even as opportunities expand on some fronts, however, they diminish on others. In recent years, American companies have outsourced significant numbers of well-paying manufacturing jobs, disproportionately ballooning the percentage of low-paying, service industry-related jobs within the blue-collar sector. More easily than in white-collar professions, blue-collar employers sometimes circumvent regulations designed to protect and benefit full-time workers by hiring help through “temp” agencies or outsourcing entire categories of workers. A new employer may offer displaced employees their same jobs back but as new employees with no or limited job protection. “After working here for fifteen

⁹ David Francis, “The Myth of the Permanent Working Class,” *US News & World Report*, accessed August 7, 2014, <http://money.usnews.com/money/personal-finance/articles/2012/10/30/the-myth-of-the-permanent-working-class>.

¹⁰ Kusnet, 46.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Francis, “The Myth of the Permanent Working Class.”

years,” said one displaced worker, “I would have had to start out as a ‘new employee’”¹³ For those able to secure necessary training and acquire the required skills, opportunities exist within the blue-collar job sector. For those with more limited resources, a difficult job market looms.

The Blue-Collar Worker: Three Qualities, Three Concerns

Contemporary literature reveals three unique cultural qualities consistent among blue-collar workers and three commonly-held and abiding concerns. This section will highlight each of these characteristics in an effort to paint a picture of key elements within the blue-collar worker’s world. Unique cultural qualities include direct communication, close-knit loyalties, and hands-on practicality. Concerns include job security, financial stability, and questions of personal identity.

Qualities of the Blue-Collar Culture

Direct Communication—“Say What You Mean”

Blue-collar people speak directly and candidly, significantly more so than other social classes. They tend to say what they think without much subtlety or nuance, avoiding “self-censorship [and] hidden agendas.”¹⁴ Like many other blue-collar qualities, this inclination toward direct speech shows up most clearly in its contrast to patterns of communication within white-collar circles.

¹³ Kusnet, 72.

¹⁴ Stuart Jeanne Bramhall, “Working Class Culture,” *The Most Revolutionary Act: Diverse Ramblings of an American Refugee*, October 25, 2010, accessed August 8, 2014, http://open.salon.com/blog/stuartbramhall/2010/10/25/working_class_culture.

While president of Haverford College, John Coleman invested a two-month sabbatical in working a series of entry-level jobs incognito. He interrupted his work as a ditch digger in Atlanta by returning to Philadelphia to conduct a meeting in his role as chairman of the Board of Directors of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia. No one at that meeting knew he had spent the past two weeks digging ditches in Atlanta.

The meeting itself centered on a weighty report from examiners with the Federal Reserve System in Washington, D.C. Coleman's lasting impression of the meeting involved the difference in conversation between the working-class ditch diggers in Atlanta and the white-collar accountants from Washington:

I was struck by how little we communicated to one another in simple, unambiguous ways. Whatever I learned beyond a few surface impressions was more often in well-guarded response to my questions than as a result of the examiners' independent offerings. . . . When they had something critical to say, they did so in such a circuitous way that I probably missed much of it, and I replied in kind. Whatever happened, I learned that ditch English has a power to communicate that bank English lacks.¹⁵

Tex Sample, from the other end of a white-collar, blue-collar exchange, arrived at a similar conclusion. His articulate and wide-ranging response when questioned about the veracity of the Virgin Birth was summarily dismissed by the working-class laborer who had asked the question:

For him, thinking and knowing seemed to have too much of an indecisive quality about them, an entertainment of options that avoided conviction. He was thoroughly suspicious of the balancing act of college-trained people who could go on and on about their opinions, but who then got lost in their fancy talk and delayed, when not avoided, commitments and action.¹⁶

¹⁵ John Royston Coleman, *Blue-Collar Journal: A College President's Sabbatical*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 1974), 85.

¹⁶ Tex Sample, *Blue Collar Resistance and the Politics of Jesus: Doing Ministry with Working Class Whites* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 51.

Blue-collar people have little use for lengthy discourse, valuing direct communication and tangible action.

As a result, verbal fluency within the working class is somewhat rare and often even discouraged. According to Charles Sackrey, the number of words spoken in a white-collar household in a day is, on average, three times greater than the number spoken in a blue-collar home—most of the difference attributable to a lack of interaction between parents and kids.¹⁷ Education-related studies reveal how early these differences begin to impact the communicative patterns of children of working-class parents. In a study of lexical naming strategies involving children as young as two years old, research revealed that “middle class parents focused on including more descriptive information about objects when discussing them with children, while the working-class parents were more concerned with naming the objects.”¹⁸ The study’s author, Jennifer Bloomquist, explains: “In shaping their children’s language development, the working-class parents put more emphasis on providing the right answer rather than on the development of expression [while] the middle-class parents encouraged their children to experiment linguistically through description and elaboration.”¹⁹ Working-class parents and children alike were more likely than their middle-class counterparts to clarify with the researcher whether or not more descriptive labels were even

¹⁷ Alfred Lubrano, *Limbo: Blue-Collar Roots, White-Collar Dreams*, 1st ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2005), 9–10.

¹⁸ Jennifer Bloomquist, “Class and Categories: What Role Does Socioeconomic Status Play in Children’s Lexical and Conceptual Development?” *Multilingua* 28, no. 4 (October 2009): 342.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

allowed, wanting better lucidity regarding expectations. Middle-class participants took that expressive liberty for granted.²⁰

The practice of direct communication sometimes puts blue-collar workers at a disadvantage interacting across social classes. Dan Croteau, raised in a working-class family, describes his employment challenge: “In working-class life, people tell you things directly, they’re not subtle. At [Northfield Mount Hermon Prep School], I didn’t get how they did things.”²¹ Analyzing interaction within a yacht club consisting of both blue-collar and white-collar members, Alfred Aversa, Jr., notes how the structure of formal meetings left the blue-collar members disadvantaged:

Their unfamiliarity with parliamentary procedure and public speaking ... make it difficult for them to be effective participants. Faced with the necessity of having to propose motions and debate them in an orderly fashion, few of them are willing to risk humiliating themselves by revealing their ignorance of the procedure and the idiom of polite debate.²²

Raised in an atmosphere of clear expectations and more direct communication, blue-collar workers often struggle in environments marked by understated speech and subtle conversational clues.

Close-knit Loyalties—“Stick with Your Kind”

Within the blue-collar environment, loyalty runs deep—particularly toward entities that are geographically and ideologically close. Loyalty to family stands as the most obvious priority in such environments. “You don’t break up the family;” writes author Alfred

²⁰ Ibid., 345.

²¹ Janny Scott and David Leonhardt, “Shadowy Lines That Still Divide,” in *Class Matters* (New York: Times Books, 2005), 57.

²² Alfred Aversa Jr., “When Blue Collars and White Collars Meet at Play: The Case of the Yacht Club,” *Qualitative Sociology* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 77.

Lubrano, “you orbit close to your kind.”²³ Whereas the middle-class family encourages and celebrates the individual achievements of its members, in the working-class world such accomplishments have a place only when family relationships remain intact and unscathed. In Lubrano’s book, *Limbo: Blue-Collar Roots, White-Collar Dreams*, the reader gets a taste of the strength of those loyal bonds when Lubrano—raised in a working-class home—participates in a strike as an adult, white-collar professional. Although he expresses confusion over the reasons for the strike and any justification for his place in it, he concludes, “But I never scabbed.”²⁴

This loyalty stretches even to relationships perhaps more perceived than real. An analysis of working-class support for George W. Bush in the 2004 U.S. presidential election shows that, while Bush and his opponent, John Kerry, had both amassed significant wealth, working-class voters perceived George W. Bush’s attitudes about wealth to match their own more consistently—attitudes that had nothing to do with positions on policy issues or even traditional values, but rather to do with coming by wealth honestly and remaining a down-to-earth person in spite of wealth. Although many argue that logic suggests a different candidate would have better served their interests, this study reveals that working-class voters made a loyal choice for George W. Bush rooted in their conviction that “morals are more important than money.”²⁵ Note that this decision grew from their perception of the differences between two multi-millionaire candidates, both much more like each other than like any working-class citizen anywhere.

²³ Lubrano, 75.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 211.

²⁵ Monica Prasad et al., “The Undeserving Rich: ‘Moral Values’ and the White Working Class,” *Sociological Forum* 24, no. 2 (June 2009): 248.

Like direct patterns of communication, strong local loyalties often negatively impact the upward mobility of working-class citizens. A 2012 study, for example, highlights a mismatch between the middle-class cultural norms of a typical college environment and the cultural norms usually present in working-class students. Middle-class norms produce an “independent model of self [that] assumes that the normatively appropriate person should influence the context, be separate or distinct from other people, and act freely based on personal motives, goals, and preferences.”²⁶ Working-class norms reflect the opposite—an “interdependent model of self [that] assumes that the normatively appropriate person should adjust to the conditions of the context, be connected to others, and respond to the needs, preferences, and interests of others.”²⁷ The study’s first concern lies with mediating the negative influences of such cultural mismatches, but here reinforces the assertions made that “working-class realities often promote socialization practices that encourage children to recognize their place in the social hierarchy, to follow the rules and social norms, and to be responsive to others’ needs”²⁸—in short, to exhibit a loyal conformity to localized relationships.²⁹

²⁶ Nicole M. Stephens et al., “Unseen Disadvantage: How American Universities’ Focus on Independence Undermines the Academic Performance of First-Generation College Students,” *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology* 102, no. 6 (June 2012): 1180.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1181.

²⁹ For a challenging look at how, in similar fashion, working class schools work against the best interests of their students, see Patrick J. Finn, “Preparing for Power in Elite Boarding Schools and in Working-Class Schools,” *Theory Into Practice* 51, no. 1 (January 2012): 57–63.

Hands-on Practicality—“If It Works, It Isn’t Stupid”

Blue-collar workers have little time for abstract theory. “The blue-collar world is built on tangibles, not symbols, as the middle-class world is.”³⁰ The thought of sitting in an office all day, attending meetings, and shuffling papers holds no appeal. As a twenty-six-year-old concrete laborer puts it, “I just appreciate that God gave me a body and I don’t think it was meant to sit on a chair.”³¹ Moreover, blue-collar workers see the results of their labor as something tangible and enduring. “Like if you were to write a paper or something, it’s great,” says a thirty-year-old masonry laborer, “and it may last hundreds of years or not, but concrete walls, unless somebody knocks it down or bulldozes it, it’s usually going to be there.”³² This attitude of intense practicality permeates the blue-collar world, impacting choices in transportation, attire,³³ recreation, homes and even spouses.

This propensity for valuing hands-on practicality sometimes results in workplace tension when blue-collar employees must implement less-than-perfect white-collar plans. Workers “often feel resentment toward ignorant managers who give orders without knowledge of what the job entails.”³⁴ A sense of contempt may result. More positively, blue-collar workers recognize, regardless of organizational hierarchy, they, in fact, hold the power to see a job gets done right. “White-collar management has theoretical authority, but the

³⁰ Lubrano, 138.

³¹ Jeff Torlina, *Working Class: Challenging Myths about Blue-Collar Labor* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2011), 25.

³² *Ibid.*, 75.

³³ Lubrano notes how, in one working-class community he visited, the sale signs in the department store announced the garments as “WASHABLE.” See Lubrano, 112.

³⁴ Torlina, 13.

worker decides how a job will be done, through both his knowledge and discretion.”³⁵ Blue-collar workers take pride in their capacities and often even adopt a personal sense of superiority for being able to accomplish an assigned task regardless of management’s failure to grasp what the job requires.

Three unique qualities, then, shape blue-collar culture. Particularly in comparison to other social groups, blue-collar workers (1) practice direct communication, (2) value close-knit loyalties, and (3) appreciate hands-on practicality. These characteristics merit attention when developing any curriculum or other tools for helping link faith to work.

An equal number of concerns persistently arise in the lives of working-class people: job security, financial stability, and issues of personal identity. The paragraphs that follow will examine these challenges and explore the unique influence they bear within the blue-collar environment.

Concerns of the Blue-Collar Worker

Job Security

In recent decades, perhaps no segment of the job market in the United States has experienced more job loss than the manufacturing sector. Timothy Egan reports this mainstay source of blue-collar employment within the American economy “has shed six million manufacturing jobs over the last three decades.”³⁶ Janny Scott and David Leonhardt concur, describing how “globalization and technological change have shuttered factories, killing jobs

³⁵ Ibid., 158.

³⁶ Timothy Egan, “No Degree, and No Way Back to the Middle,” in *Class Matters* (New York: Times Books, 2005), 106.

that were once stepping-stones to the middle class.”³⁷ Even where new jobs are being created, they do not match the quality of lost jobs. A recent report by the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment notes that employment losses from the recession that began in 2008 were “concentrated in mid-wage occupations with median hourly wages between \$13.84 and \$21.13.”³⁸ Recovery growth, however, has been concentrated in “lower-wage occupations—jobs paying a median hourly [income] between \$7.69 and \$13.83.”³⁹ These jobs accounted for only 21 percent of jobs lost during the recession but now account for 58 percent of recovery growth. Such statistics prompt concerns over job security, then, not only with regard to a worker being able to keep an existing job, but also with regard to the elimination of better-paying jobs and the lower-wage jobs replacing them.

Concern over job security impacts the mental health of the blue-collar worker more severely than with other job types. A recent study by Leigh Ann Simmons and Jennifer E. Swanberg revealed that while job-related factors negatively impacted the mental health of every worker, with regard to the working poor in particular, “job insecurity was the single significant correlate of depressive symptoms after controlling for other demographic and work environment variables.”⁴⁰ Even in situations where other correlates contributing to mental health issues were mediated, a sense of job insecurity continued to promote depressive symptoms.

³⁷ Scott and Leonhardt, 19.

³⁸ Mehreen Rasheed, “A Brief Look at Poverty in America,” *Journal of Housing & Community Development* 70, no. 2 (April 3, 2013): 7.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Simmons and Swanberg, “Psychosocial Work Environment and Depressive Symptoms among US Workers,” 628.

Changes within the work environment itself magnify employment concerns. Kusnet describes two “social contracts” deteriorating within the American workplace for the blue-collar worker. The first, he says, “involves things that can easily be measured and grasped: a job that lasts a lifetime, regular raises every year, health insurance for your family, and a pension waiting for you when you retire. [In short,] ... security in return for loyalty.”⁴¹ The second involves an unexpressed understanding that “if you poured your energy and intelligence into your work, then your employer had better show you some gratitude and allow you some discretion to do your job the best way you knew how”⁴²—something Kusnet describes as “trading commitment for respect.”⁴³ The blue-collar worker sees both of these unwritten agreements disappearing. Indeed, Kusnet describes how employees wonder whether their commitment to their job is misplaced altogether. He describes “an increasing conflict between workers’ commitment to their occupations and employers and their sense that their employers do not share their dedication.”⁴⁴ Rank and file workers fear they often carry more commitment to the success of their employer’s business than the level of commitment they see evidenced in the business owners and members of management themselves. Specifically, they see priorities that would facilitate business longevity sacrificed by business leaders for short-term financial gains. As a result, concerns over job security continue to fester.

⁴¹ Kusnet, 83.

⁴² Ibid., 84.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 162.

Financial Stability

Of course, concerns over job security only intensify concerns regarding money. While some highly skilled workers earn significant income, many low and unskilled workers survive on little more than subsistence wages. According to Bureau of Labor Statistics wage estimates from May of 2013, workers such as janitors, grounds maintenance workers, and auto mechanics, earned median hourly wages ranging from \$10.86 per hour to \$19.17 per hour. This compares with wages for occupations such as claims adjusters, database and systems managers, and marketing and sales managers where wages ranged from \$29.43 per hour to \$54.61 per hour.⁴⁵ Even across social classes, people understand this concern impacts blue-collar workers more significantly. “For middle or upper class women with high levels of education,” for example, “work is generally considered a career aspiration, a choice based on self-fulfillment motives.”⁴⁶ The presumed motive for lower class women with less than a college degree remains financial survival.

Understandably, hourly employees like these not only struggle to survive, but often resent the wages sometimes paid corporate CEOs. “In 1974,” writes Darren Wood, “the ratio of a corporate CEO to the pay of their average worker was 34 to 1; today it is 531 to 1.”⁴⁷ Such inequity only multiplies blue-collar frustrations regarding money.

⁴⁵ “May 2013 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates: United States,” Bureau of Labor Statistics, last modified April 1, 2014, accessed August 23, 2014, http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm. The blue collar examples shown were updated from job categories listed in one of the resources consulted for this study. The white collar examples were chosen at random for purposes of comparison with the blue collar occupational wages.

⁴⁶ Gökçe Güngör and Monica Biernat, “Gender Bias or Motherhood Disadvantage? Judgments of Blue Collar Mothers and Fathers in the Workplace,” *Sex Roles* 60, no. 3/4 (February 2009): 236.

⁴⁷ Darren Cushman Wood, *Blue Collar Jesus: How Christianity Supports Workers’ Rights* (Santa Ana, CA: Seven Locks Press, 2004), 24.

Working class attitudes about money factor in, as well. Ruby Payne writes about the “hidden rules”⁴⁸ that shape how various economic classes view money. Where a member of the middle class typically views money as a resource to manage, and a member of the upper class views it as something to conserve and invest, members of the working class—especially those surviving on subsistence wages—view money as a resource to use. The difference is subtle but significant. For the working poor especially, they often see the intentional management of financial resources as fruitless because of the incessant demands made on such a limited supply. A child of working-class parents, Angela Witiker notes how, unlike those she eventually came to know in middle-class circles, “she had never had enough money or [any] reason to save”⁴⁹ and consistently ignored things like late fees and interest rates “because she couldn’t pay the bills anyway.”⁵⁰

Additionally, in many working class environments, the community almost views money as communal property with a concurrent expectation that anyone among them with unspent cash or an unexpected windfall should share his or her good fortune with everyone. Payne illustrates this propensity with the fictional scenario of a working class woman who receives a Christmas bonus. When she testifies to her blessing at church, she’s approached by three different people: “one asks for \$50 to have the electricity turned on; one asks for \$100 to feed her brother’s family, one asks for \$60 to replace a pair of broken glasses.”⁵¹ While a firm “No, I have other plans for this money” may, for a member of the middle class, seem the

⁴⁸ Ruby K. Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty; A Cognitive Approach*, 5th ed. (Highlands, TX: aha! Process, 2013), 42.

⁴⁹ Scott and Leonhardt, 211.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Payne, 14.

obvious response to such requests, the culture of the working poor pressures its members toward a different conclusion. Such circumstances by no means serve as characteristic of every blue-collar worker, but many in low-paying jobs do consistently struggle to stay afloat financially in a cultural context that views money differently than its middle- or upper-class counterparts.

Personal Identity

Personal identity stands as a third concern of blue-collar workers. This challenge appears fueled by two competing realities: first, the negative experience of life as a sometimes-demeaning battle of survival, and second, the positive experience of satisfaction found in blue-collar work generally and in the completion of work well done, particularly.

Job insecurities and financial constraints certainly feed the collective sense of life as a battle. Particularly in contrast to white-collar, career-minded workers, blue-collar people tend to view life less as an opportunity to achieve and more as a struggle to survive. Leslie Rubin captures the sentiment, summarizing the childhood memories of working-class adults she interviewed:

They recall parents who worked hard, yet never quite made it; homes that were overcrowded; siblings or selves who got into “trouble”; a preoccupation with the daily struggle for survival that precluded planning for a future. Whether they recall angry, discontented, drunken parents, or quiet, steady, “always-there” parents, the dominant theme is struggle and trouble. These realities not only reflect the past, but dominate the present.⁵²

Lubrano, noting that blue-collar workers often view life’s challenges as key to personal development, describes struggle as “central to blue-collar life and the chief architect

⁵² Lillian Breslow Rubin, *Worlds of Pain: Life in the Working Class Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 48.

of character.”⁵³ Working-class occupants intuitively perceive their disadvantages: “We blue collars grew up understanding at an early age that it’s who you know. . . . And we didn’t know anybody.”⁵⁴ Some embrace a fatalistic attitude regarding the future. “God doesn’t close one door,” says one, “without slamming your fingers in another.”⁵⁵ Of course, not every blue-collar worker sees life in such a dim light. Still, understanding life as an ongoing battle and struggle as a constant companion remains widespread within the blue-collar world. In *Blue-Collar Ministry*, Tex Sample, one of the few writers actually targeting ministry within this specific arena, describes how a forty year-old man from working-class roots but now a multi-millionaire felt compelled to continue “striving for dignity”⁵⁶ over a passing remark made twenty-five years earlier. Anthony DePalma, writing about an illegal immigrant who quit his job, again, after an argument with his boss, clarifies, “In his mind, preserving his dignity is one of the few liberties he has left.”⁵⁷ Building a healthy personal identity in the face of constant struggle remains a daunting task.

Were this the only component to a blue-collar sense of personal identity, a consistently bleak outlook would result. These workers, however, often gain a sense of significant value and take great pride in what they accomplish individually and collectively within the workplace. A study by Thomas Gorman shows that “working class respondents differentiated themselves from middle-class respondents by noting they do real work, do

⁵³ Lubrano, 18.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Tex Sample, *Blue Collar Ministry: Facing Economic and Social Realities of Working People* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1984), 28.

⁵⁷ Anthony DePalma, “Fifteen Years on the Bottom Rung,” in *Class Matters* (New York: Times Books, 2005), 132.

more important work, and are more down-to-earth.”⁵⁸ Jeff Torlina argues that the lower occupational prestige assigned to blue-collar labor may have more to do with arbitrary judgments made by social scientist than with the realities of job satisfaction as experienced by blue-collar workers. “Stratification theory,” he writes, “depends upon a model of the occupational prestige hierarchy in which white-collar occupations are generally recognized as superior to blue-collar occupations. This reflects the standards of the professional class, not the working class.”⁵⁹ Torlina, that is to say, suggests that white-collar professionals—who understandably celebrate white-collar work—embraced early on a fundamental paradigm for social science research that elevated the status of white-collar jobs and minimized the significance of blue-collar employment. As a result, “consciously or unconsciously, the dominant theories of social inequality promote an inferior identity for working-class people.”⁶⁰ The framers of paradigms within the social sciences decided without sufficient basis to esteem white-collar employment more highly than blue-collar labor.

Torlina’s research suggests blue-collar workers feel differently about the stature of white-collar professions versus their own: “Blue-collar workers do not equate white-collar occupations with prestige. ... Education and income levels are simply not signs of prestige or importance for the sampled working-class men. In fact, they actually see these variables in negative ways.”⁶¹ Indeed, many blue-collar workers believe white-collar workers have sold

⁵⁸ Thomas J. Gorman, “Cross-Class Perceptions of Social Class,” *Sociological Spectrum* 20, no. 1 (January 2000): 116.

⁵⁹ Torlina, 13.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

out, choosing the pursuit of money over the opportunity to do real work. By contrast, they see their own work as more valuable than just money and desirable for reasons intrinsic to the work itself. In an emotional testimony before a Senate panel recently, one West Virginia coal miner spoke for himself and his co-workers, declaring convincingly, “I take pride in being a miner.”⁶² That brief expression captures the heart of many blue-collar workers who see their jobs as practical, challenging, and essential for the continuing growth and progress of the American economy.

Conflicting realities, then, shape the challenge of personal identity for the typical blue-collar worker. A perception of life as an ongoing struggle and cultural norms that often minimize or dismiss the value of blue-collar labor battle against a more positive and intuitive sense of self-worth fueled by occupational pride and practical on-the-job accomplishments. Job security, financial stability, and personal identity remain ongoing concerns for blue-collar workers.

The Blue-Collar Worker and the Faith at Work Movement

In recent years, the faith at work (FAW) movement has gained remarkable momentum, resulting in hundreds of new books and organizations. This movement seeks to elevate a biblical understanding of the relationship between faith and the marketplace for the working public. Currently, the FAW movement typically targets entrepreneurs and business owners. A century ago, however—long before the utilization of the standardized phrase “faith at work”—church and working-class connections flourished, as well. In multiple

⁶² “Coal Miner Walter Parker Gives Emotional Testimony at EPA Hearing,” *Independent Journal Review*, accessed August 8, 2014, <http://www.ijreview.com/2014/08/163606-coal-miner-delivers-extraordinarily-moving-testimonial-epa-hearings>.

settings on varied levels the church, both through professional clergy and devout non-clergy, brought the influence of Christian faith to bear in the marketplace of the common worker.

Regrettably, the bonds of association between the laborer of faith, his or her work, and the church itself have deteriorated significantly over the second half of the twentieth century. Yet blue-collar workers still matter deeply to Jesus, His Kingdom, and the spiritual health and economic vitality of the United States. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, blue-collar workers still comprise 61 percent of the American work force.⁶³ Given the potential for the kind of economic, social, cultural, and spiritual transformation that would result from a revitalization of faith-integration in the blue-collar environment, the church must recognize, understand, and address this division. This section will begin that process by reviewing historical points of connection between people of faith and the blue-collar environment.

The History of Blue-Collar Faith at Work

Modern production techniques first began to impact the U.S. labor market in the early decades of the 1800s. The creation of goods transitioned from small artisan-operated shops to centrally-located, factory-based production. Attitudes about work and compensation shifted, as well, from an artisan-determined pace and price to the idea of labor purchased at an hourly rate. A producer ethic gave way to a profit ethic, alienating craftsmen from the creative control they once enjoyed over both product and remuneration. In the space of a few decades, “machines replaced hand tools; factories replaced shops; factory workers replaced artisans;

⁶³ “Workers by Occupational Category,” The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, accessed August 15, 2014, <http://kff.org/other/state-indicator/blue-and-white-collar-workers/>.

large cities replaced small villages; [and] mass-produced goods replaced handicrafts.”⁶⁴ This shift demanded a re-examination of the implications of Christian faith in the American marketplace. Christians responded in several key cities: Methodist Protestants in Baltimore, Stilwellites in New York City, Congregationalists in Boston, and Quakers in Wilmington, Delaware all gave leadership in support of labor.⁶⁵ Efforts in Delaware led to the birth of the Association of Working People.

Economic difficulty marked the years immediately following the civil war. Predominantly, church leadership inclined toward continuing support of free-market capitalism, reinforcing “the idea that poverty and failure was equivalent to sin.”⁶⁶ But by 1900, Darrell Wood argues, the persistent problems of the industrial revolution resulted in the development of four major religious responses. First, a “worker’s expression of Christianity”⁶⁷ arose, influencing the modern American labor movement principally through the creation of the Christian Labor Union. These pragmatic people identified particularly with Jesus the Carpenter who, for them, “expressed God’s solidarity with the poor”⁶⁸ and provided an example for subversive activity on behalf of the impoverished. They believed God’s vision of a just society demanded they act on behalf of the oppressed.

⁶⁴ Lee Hardy, *The Fabric of This World: Inquiries into Calling, Career Choice, and the Design of Human Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 129.

⁶⁵ Wood, 58.

⁶⁶ Elizabeth Fones-Wolf and Kenneth Fones-Wolf, “Trade-Union Evangelism: Religion and the AFL in the Labor Forward Movement,” in *Working-Class America: Essays on Labor, Community, and American Society*, ed. Daniel J. Walkowitz and Michael H. Frisch, 1st ed. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 155.

⁶⁷ Wood, 59.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

The Social Gospel, a second response, grew from the work of middle-class clergy and academic scholars who were “sympathetic to the cause of labor, urban renewal, and prison reform.”⁶⁹ David Miller offers that by this point in American history “the compartmentalization of faith and work into separate domains or spheres of life became the norm.”⁷⁰ Within Protestantism, three broad streams of thought resulted. Conservative social Christianity, rooted in premillennial eschatology, limited spirituality to individual conversion and evidenced no real interest in addressing societal concerns.⁷¹ Radical social Christianity, tied to postmillennial theology, focused almost exclusively on cultural renewal. The Social Gospel, from Miller’s perspective, most successfully harmonized concern for both the individual soul and society’s unjust structures. Still, Miller admits, “with its perceived labor orientation, the Social Gospel never gained a nationwide or grassroots following in the broader church and found its popularity limited largely to congregations in the more liberal northeastern states.”⁷² He suggests that may have been so because the Social Gospel’s pro-labor orientation clashed with the priorities of church members residing in higher socioeconomic classes.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 62.

⁷⁰ David W. Miller, *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 27.

⁷¹ An article from the October 1912 edition of the *Latter Rain Evangel* expresses this attitude fully, lamenting for several paragraphs the impoverished condition of the working class, the increasing centralization of wealth in the hands of only a few individuals, and the resultant unrest and threat of political upheaval. Ultimately the author asks, “Will legislation redress the working man’s wrongs and the working woman’s wrong? Not in any appreciable degree . . .” But “Praise the Lord! . . . In a very little while He will come as Judge to arbitrate this weary world’s wrongs. . . . Are you ready for His coming?” See Max Moorehead, “The Labor Problem and Our Lord’s Return,” *Latter Rain Evangel*, October 1912, 18-19.

⁷² Miller, 29.

Third, Wood writes about well-known evangelists who enthusiastically supported big business and “condemned the poor for creating their own poverty through laziness and immorality.”⁷³ As an example, he quotes D. L. Moody: “I don’t believe a man would have a lazy hair on his head if he was converted to the Lord Jesus Christ.”⁷⁴ Writing in 1907, Lutheran minister Luther Waring offers a similar declaration: “We hear men complaining that they do not have a chance. Let them but work half as hard as they loaf and half as hard as they complain, and they will make something of themselves.”⁷⁵ Wood submits that some of these evangelists found solid financial backing in successful business owners and warmly receptive hearts in middle- and upper-class audiences.

Finally, Wood identifies a fourth response in “liberal elite pastors who embraced the new biblical interpretations that questioned the authority of Scripture.”⁷⁶ These, too, predominantly believed poverty to be the fault of the worker. Wood offers the ostentatious Henry Ward Beecher as his example. Beecher, he reports, “embraced the social application of Darwinism and the ‘great law of subordination’ among social classes.”⁷⁷ With regard to labor, capitalism, and the American economy, then, it appears that at the opening of the twentieth century, liberals and fundamentalists alike found reasons to adopt positions at every conceivable location along the spectrum.

⁷³ Wood, 63.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Luther Hess Waring, *The Law and the Gospel of Labor* (London: Forgotten Books, 2012), 104.

⁷⁶ Wood, 64.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

With the increasing secularization and commercialization of the American economy, however, the need for any religious underpinning in support of labor organization diminished, threatening a vital connection between work and faith. In 1905, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) emerged as an alternative to faith-based labor efforts. The Wobblies, as they were known, saw religion as private, churches as hypocritical, Jesus—the one “who died at the hands of the greedy elite”⁷⁸—as a friend of the worker, and the IWW as the new religion of American labor. This thoroughly secular vision advanced in spite of overtures extended by the church. As Wood explains, however, the growing separation between the church and labor was neither complete nor final:

Ironically, as the IWW moved farther away from Christianity, church leaders were moving toward an enthusiastic embrace of the cause of labor. A number of Protestant denominations followed the example of the Federal Council of Churches and adopted “Social Creed,” which expressed the main tenets of the Social Gospel’s stances on child labor, governmental reform, and the elimination of poverty. With Pope Leo XIII’s letter *Rerum Novarum* on labor issues, Catholic leaders actively tried to support and influence the AFL. Official church endorsement of labor’s cause was becoming a reality.⁷⁹

David Montgomery reports that in 1901, the advisory council of the National Civic Foundation included twenty-three Protestant clergymen and editors, two Catholic editors, and Archbishop John Ireland.⁸⁰ This newly-formed organization ultimately proved instrumental in “expanding and helping make uniform state laws regarding child labor, workmen’s compensation, and factory safety.”⁸¹ In 1912, the American Federation of Labor initiated the

⁷⁸ Ibid., 66.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ See Montgomery, 303–304.

⁸¹ Augustus Cerillo, Jr., “National Civic Federation,” in *Historical Dictionary of the Progressive Era*, ed. John D. Buenker and Edward Kantowicz (New York: Greenwood, 1988), 307.

Labor Forward movement. In the launch city of Minneapolis, by the campaign's opening day, "more than twenty-five ministers ... had announced that organized labor would be welcome in their meeting houses during the labor revival."⁸²

A report prepared by the Interchurch World Movement in 1919 showed how biased reporting negatively impacted the efforts of striking steelworkers, occasioning positive governmental action on behalf of labor. In 1932, the Federal Council of Churches established the National Religion and Labor Foundation.⁸³ Still, as two World Wars broke the visionary optimism once so prevalent at the beginning of the "Christian Century,"⁸⁴ the secularization of the workplace and the divide between the church and the common laborer solidified. In his classic work *Your Other Vocation*, released in 1952, Elton Trueblood laments the loss:

There are large churches without a single member who also belongs to a labor union. The characteristic supporters of the Christian movement are white-collar workers, managers, professional people and farmers. The gravity of the loss is made vivid by the fact that, in some cities, meetings of labor unions are now held in labor "temples" at eleven o'clock on Sunday mornings.⁸⁵ In short, the province of labor is so far lost that, far from thinking of itself as a part of the Christian movement, it has set itself up as a genuine rival, in the competition for loyalty.⁸⁶

⁸² Fones-Wolf and Fones-Wolf, 158.

⁸³ Now the Religion and Labor Council of America.

⁸⁴ The confidence of turn-of-the-century believers "that the coming century is to witness greater triumphs in Christianity than any previous century has ever witnessed, and that it is to be more truly Christian than any of its predecessors" led to the use of the phrase "Christian Century" to describe the twentieth century and even to its adoption as the title for what became the leading mainline Protestant periodical of its day. For more information, see "The Origins of the Christian Century, 1884-1914," *The Christian Century*, accessed August 14, 2014, <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/%252Forigins-ofthe-christian-century-1884-1914>.

⁸⁵ The "Labor Temples" Trueblood references here were something of a church/union hall hybrid—a "faith and work" concept first implemented and promoted in the United States by Charles Stelzle, a Presbyterian minister and proponent of the Social Gospel. By the time of Trueblood's writing, most were completely secular. A few exist yet today. For more information, see Charles Stelzle, *The Church and Labor* (Boston: The Riverside Press, 1910), accessed August 14, 2014, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc2.ark:/13960/t7dr30b90>.

⁸⁶ Elton Trueblood, *Your Other Vocation*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper, 1952), 16.

Trueblood then notes the labor movement's Christian roots:

There is no doubt that this loss is very great. The sense of its seriousness is accentuated by the recognition of the degree to which the earlier labor movement was so largely inspired by conscious Christian motivation. Men ... became union organizers in an effort to make Christian ideals prevail, but little of this connection now remains.⁸⁷

Already then, by the 1950s, the common laborer and perhaps, to some degree, the church, had divorced faith from work. While interest in the connection between faith and the marketplace continued to develop among certain business professionals,⁸⁸ its link within the blue-collar arena faltered. Rather than an integrated understanding of faith and work, Miller concludes that “businesspeople and other churchgoers ... found the paradigm of conflict—an unbridgeable chasm between faith and work—to be the only way to make sense of the tension between faith and work.”⁸⁹ This perspective voided the connection between the two elements, resulting in a compartmentalized worldview—something that ultimately proved not only theologically problematic but pragmatically unworkable.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, Miller explains, the FAW movement gained fresh momentum. This new vitality grew from a renewed appreciation for the possibilities of integration with regard to the conflicted elements of faith and work:

Integration acknowledges the distinctive natures of faith and work, as well as other different spheres of life, while also bringing them together in a reconstructive, dialectical, and holistic fashion. The quest for integration avoids the naïveté of expecting the kingdom of God to be realized here on earth, but it also rejects the alternative extreme of despair and cynicism. The quest for integration seeks to approximate wholeness and balance while recognizing the difficulty of attaining it. It knows the reality of sin, yet it hopes for sanctification and transformation in light of

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Note, for example, Miller's discussion of the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International and the Fellowship of Companies for Christ International in Miller, 51.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 41.

salvation promises, even if these can only be fully realized in an eschatological horizon beyond our present capacities.

Although any movement toward the integration of faith and work seems both significant and positive, the action in this third wave of FAW activity seems to occur almost exclusively in the domain of business professionals. Miller's language reveals the movement's bias: "*Businesspeople* want the ability to bring their whole selves to work ... Christian *businesspeople* and other *professionals* find common agreement [against] living a bifurcated life ..."⁹⁰ (emphasis added). Carefully chosen gender-neutral verbiage discloses the unintentional oversight of another neglected subgroup: labor.

This study exists to help address that omission. Neither the church as an entity nor its members individually can continue to isolate the richness of Sunday from the realities of Monday. While the business owner or white-collar executive takes full advantage of opportunities to embrace biblical values and express Christian redemption in activities and decisions that set the course for his or her business, the hourly employee—down to the most common laborer—must sense the same richness of opportunity to fulfill God's purpose and express Kingdom realities in the simplest and even most mundane work assignment. The church has too often fixated on less practical matters. As Miroslav Volf observes, "The number of pages theologians have devoted to the question of transubstantiation—which does or does not take place on Sunday—for instance, would, I suspect, far exceed the number of pages devoted to work that fills our lives Monday through Saturday."⁹¹ If Whelchel is correct, however, at least some of that energy and attention on the part of the church is

⁹⁰ Ibid., 74.

⁹¹ Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 69.

misplaced. Welchel concludes, “The most overlooked reason for the failure of the church to influence the culture is the loss of the Biblical doctrine of work.”⁹²

Certainly the challenges have changed from a century ago, when issues like workplace safety, reasonable compensation, and manageable hours demanded immediate attention—although reviewing that list suggests each one may still need consideration even now. Today, however, the blue-collar worker frustrated by monotony on the job, for example, may need help understanding the significance of ordinary labor or perhaps biblical direction on how to improve his or her employment opportunities in a changing market. With the advent of multi-national corporations, questions about ethical activity international in scope may impact the decisions of the person stocking shelves at the discount store. The waitress or custodial staff wounded by society-wide attitudes that place value on a person according to the perceived status of his or her employment may need fresh awareness that, for his first assignment, God handed Adam—formed in His image and for His glory—a garden rake. The church must seize existing opportunities and create new occasions to help laborers understand the intimate connection between faith and work and the value of their work in God’s Kingdom.

Emphases in Current Literature

Four themes arise consistently in the contemporary FAW literature that carry significant implications for the blue-collar worker: The nature of work, the challenge of work, the means of work, and the goal of work. This section will examine each of these themes, highlighting pertinent motifs from current writings.

⁹² Welchel, 102.

The Nature of Work: Replication

Current FAW literature carries substantial discussion regarding the nature of work. Fundamentally, the nature of work consists in replication—relating to and acting on this creation as the One who formed all that is has Himself related and acted. As Genesis makes clear, God formed humanity “in His image” (Gen. 1:26-27). Although discussions on the implications of that declaration draw varied conclusions, the FAW movement appears united in its conviction that, through its work, humanity serves as God’s representative on the earth, formed to do the sorts of things God would do, on His behalf and in partnership with Him. Tom Nelson speaks for the movement: “At a very foundational level, we must recognize our image-bearing reveals that God is a creator, a worker,”⁹³ When human beings work, they act in the image of the One who formed them.

More specifically, replicative work carries responsibilities both for preserving what is and creating what ought to be. In Genesis 2, God places Adam in the Garden of Eden with instructions to “work it and keep it” (v. 15). Humanity’s calling, then, involves preserving and extending the creative acts of God described in the previous verses of Genesis. “Our work, whatever it is ... is our specific contribution to God’s ongoing creation and to the common good.”⁹⁴ Andy Crouch compares humanity’s roles to those of the gardener and the artist. “The gardener tends what has gone before, making the most of what is beautiful and weeding out what is distracting or useless. The artist can be more daring: she starts with a blank canvas or a solid piece of stone and gradually brings something out of it that was never

⁹³ Tom Nelson, *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 22.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

there before.”⁹⁵ Whether cultivating or creating, the one created in the image of God works as God has worked.

Two key qualities characterize work that successfully replicates God’s creative action. First, such work is somehow communal. Efforts that recognize and work in harmony with others replicate the Triune Godhead’s creative activity in Genesis. “In the Garden,” writes Jeff Van Duzer, “work was situated in the context of humankind’s partnership with God, and this relationship gave meaning and direction to the work.”⁹⁶ That changes with the Fall; work somehow transitions from a gift offered to God as worship to something essential for survival. The replicative worker transitions back toward that place where, in confident assurance that God has already supplied every need by means of His rich grace, all labor functions as a relational gift freely present to God and others.

Second, sustainability characterizes replicative work. “The notion of sustainability,” Van Duzer observes, “was embedded in God’s original design. Human beings ... were given seed-bearing fruit to eat so that consumption of the individual items of fruit would not, over the long term, detract from the fruit-producing capacity of the Garden.”⁹⁷ Humanity’s work must echo that quality, not just in terms of the ecological concerns so prominent today but likewise in terms even of human capital as a sustainable resource. Van Duzer offers this powerful observation to business owners and managers:

With respect to employees, sustainability means that their character as God’s image-bearers cannot be used up. This requires that they be treated as having intrinsic value, not just as a means of production. It requires that their privacy be respected and that

⁹⁵ Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2008), 97.

⁹⁶ Jeff Van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 56.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

they not be required to work in conditions that are unreasonably dangerous or demeaning. Sustainability requires that businesses respect the rhythm of rest and work that God built into the fabric of creation, a rhythm that is necessary to allow for right relations with God and for the full humanity of individuals. A 24/7 demand for workplace availability is not sustainability. The notion of sustainability also undergirds the notion that employees should be paid a living wage. It is not sustainable for a business to use up all of the productive capacity of a person and not give him or her an amount sufficient to live on in return.⁹⁸

Communal, sustainable work that both preserves and extends God's creative acts most fully reflects work done as His representatives and in His image. Properly executed, it duplicates the kind of work God did in forming this world and creating humanity in His image as part of it.

The Challenge of Work: Integration

Integration describes the current challenge of work. David Miller portrays the task externally in terms of achieving the correct proportion of concern for both the individual soul and society's unjust structures. On a more internal level, the challenge of work involves working in a way that navigates successfully both the realities of the Fall and the implications of creation, redemption, and resurrection.

The impact of the Fall seems most easily understood. In the curse of Genesis 3:17-19 "the topography of human work has been altered."⁹⁹ As a result, "at this point in redemptive history," Nelson notes, "our work will not be all we want it to be."¹⁰⁰ Paul Rude suggests the Fall's influence shows up where humans perceive work as nothing more than a curse to be tolerated. "We live under a curse," he writes, "so it's easy to assume that work itself is a

⁹⁸ Ibid., 158–159.

⁹⁹ Nelson, 38.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 47.

curse.”¹⁰¹ Given the parallelism of Genesis 3:17-19, however, consistency demands that any such claim be matched by an assertion that having children is a curse, as well. In spite of the difficulties associated with childbirth, however, “we tend to assume work is a curse, and childbearing is a beautiful experience—a celebrated thing.”¹⁰² As a more complete reading of Genesis shows, work itself is no curse. Rather, work stands as God’s gift, however deeply complicated by humanity’s sin.

Rude further suggests that the Fall’s influence appears where people see work as the foundational source of human identity and self-worth. Timothy Keller speaks to Rude’s concern when he observes the progression of work from a place of joyful cultivation in Genesis 1 to a source of human identity in Genesis 11. The people of Babel build a tower as a statement of identity—“let us make a name for ourselves” (Gen. 11: 4). Their purpose, Keller asserts, “. . . was to maximize their power, glory, and autonomy,”¹⁰³ In so doing, ironically, they “reveal their radical insecurity.”¹⁰⁴ Keller suggests the same stands true for the many ambitious workers today who establish their entire sense of personhood in on-the-job accomplishment and career advancement. Today’s worker must not only dismiss the idea of work as merely a curse to tolerate but also discard a reliance on his or her work as the primary source of personal identity.

¹⁰¹ Paul Rude, *Significant Work: Discover the Extraordinary Worth of What You Do Every Day*, 1st ed. (Copper Center, AK: Everyday Significance, 2013), 87.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁰³ Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Work*, Reprint ed. (New York: Riverhead Trade, 2014), 110.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

An integrated understanding that acknowledges the impact of sin while recognizing work's inherent goodness and value remains the task of the worker. "The challenge that faces the church and society more broadly then," explains Jordon Ballor, "is to appreciate the spiritual meaningfulness of all kinds of work, to celebrate it, and to exhort us to persevere in our labors amidst the unavoidable troubles that plague work in this fallen world."¹⁰⁵ Each person must mix into his or her perception of work an understanding of the implications of creation, redemption, and resurrection as the biblical narrative declares them. In short, creation declares work is good and remains one of the key ways humanity functions in the image of God. Redemption announces that work is once more purposeful, as the relational context in which it was launched has now been restored through Christ. The resurrection declares that, in some fashion perhaps yet fully understood, work is eternal as part of God's promised renewal of all creation. These implications will be discussed more fully under the topic of the goal of work, but they provide an essential correction to and even reversal of the impact of sin's curse and the propensity to elevate work as the foundational source of self-identity.

The Means of Work: Impartation

Essentially, the question of the means of work asks how—by what means—shall work be done. The answer boils down to an understanding of the doctrine of vocation (from *vocare*, the Latin word for "calling,"¹⁰⁶ used in reference to the call of God to partner with Him). In order to replicate the activity of God in creation and integrate a healthy

¹⁰⁵ Jordan J. Ballor, *Get Your Hands Dirty: Essays on Christian Social Thought (and Action)* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 56.

¹⁰⁶ Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 17.

understanding of work as good, purposeful, and eternally redeemable, the worker must function in light of the call of God and in light of the giftings and empowerment that He provides concurrent with that call.

Comprehending labor as a response to God’s invitation and equipping, when raised in the context of the Protestant Reformation nearly five-hundred years ago, transformed the existing culture. This understanding brought a fresh sense of equality for every person because it brought a new sense of dignity to every job. As a result, “the Protestant church enjoyed its greatest cultural influence—in art, literature, music, as well as in social institutions.”¹⁰⁷ In a contemporary culture so robustly celebrating uniqueness and individuality, the concept of vocation serves as a powerful point of connection by which the church can honor the distinctive qualities of every individual and influence the use of those qualities for the advancement of Christ’s kingdom. “Church and marketplace leaders willing to revision the doctrine of vocation and apply it within the twenty-first century American culture,” declares Sharon Smith, “will capitalize on a tremendous opportunity to answer the heart-cry of many people and potentially lead multitudes of people to the One who calls.”¹⁰⁸ Where so few currently see a clear connection between work and faith, growth in vocational understanding holds rich promise for both greater self-fulfillment and radical cultural transformation.

Os Guinness offers an understanding of vocation rooted first in terms of the believer’s calling by, to, and for Christ. That calling stands as primary before and foundational to a

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 21.

¹⁰⁸ Sharon L. Smith, “Bridging the Gap: Equipping the Church to Envision and Empower Workplace Believers as Kingdom Catalysts of Transformation in Their Communities” (D.Min. proj., Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2013), 68.

“secondary calling ... that everyone, everywhere, and in everything should think, speak, live, and act entirely for him”¹⁰⁹ This idea of a progressively layered vocational calling finds expression in Jesus’ designation of twelve disciples as apostles. Mark says Jesus “appointed twelve that they might be with him [their primary calling] and that he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons [their secondary calling]” (Mark 3:14-15). R. Paul Stevens describes this as “being called to *Someone* before we are called to do *something*.”¹¹⁰ The primary call establishes and facilitates the secondary.

The secondary calling, Guinness emphasizes, exists only because of the first and stands distorted without it. Malformed understandings surface in at least two ways: First, they show up in those who value the spiritual dimension of life to the neglect or devaluing of the material dimension of life. Medieval Christianity perhaps reflects this error most clearly, as there “the term *calling* was reserved for priests, monks, and nuns. Everyone else just had ‘work.’”¹¹¹ But a second distortion appears when any worker ignores the essential necessity of a divine Caller from whom the call extends. In dismissing the Caller Himself, people secularize the calling and sacralize their work. The vocabulary of vocation, then, rather than expressing a life lived in every way as a response to God’s call, becomes nothing more than “a genteel word for lesser paid but sacrificial workers (such as nurses), for the religious (such as missionaries), and for the more practically oriented.”¹¹² When the Caller is dismissed,

¹⁰⁹ Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 31.

¹¹⁰ R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective*, 1st North American ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 72.

¹¹¹ Guinness, 33.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 40.

vocational training exists not as a sacred avenue for learning how best to respond to God’s *vocare*, but as nothing more than quite secular preparation in a certain set of job skills. The call stands divorced from its source and the work from its purpose.

Correcting these errors demands two remedial actions: “the debunking of the notion of calling without a Caller and the restoring of the primacy of the primary calling.”¹¹³ The call of God paired to any particular task, role, or spiritual gift functions rightly only in the larger context of that broader calling. But “when you answer God’s call to use your gifts in work, whether by making clothes, practicing law, tilling the field, mending broken bodies or nurturing children, you are participating in God’s work.”¹¹⁴ The means of work—that impartation evidenced as the equipping of the person whose life is a response to God’s call—begins as humans respond to God’s invitation to partner with him.

Volf takes the matter of calling and impartation a step further, convinced that the classical doctrine of vocation anchors too deeply in protology and not aggressively enough in eschatology: “The Spirit of God should determine the whole life,” he writes, “spiritual as well as secular.”¹¹⁵ The outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as recorded in Acts 2, changes everything, relocating the locus of vocation from its roots in the creation account toward a new focus on the future consummation of all things in Christ. “New creation is the end of all God’s purposes with the universe, and as such, either explicitly or implicitly, is the necessary criterion of all human action that can be considered good.”¹¹⁶ For Volf, the charismata of the

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹¹⁴ Hugh Whelchel, *How Then Should We Work?: Rediscovering the Biblical Doctrine of Work* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2012), 19.

¹¹⁵ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 79.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 81.

Spirit, including even the fluidity and impermanence that sometimes characterizes their distribution, now defines the particulars of Christ's calling for the believer.

Through empowered workers, the transformative capacity of the Spirit extends into the practical, touchable, and tangible parts of the world. "Gifts in the new creation do not only serve a sacred, invisible realm," asserts Terry Cross, "but also serve the physical needs of humanity."¹¹⁷ Stevens affirms the same, declaring, "Spiritual gifts are not just for the edification of believers. They are for the world, for entering into God's beautiful work of transforming creation, culture, community, and people."¹¹⁸ The Great Commission demands just such an infusion of Spirit-empowered service, but the church's reluctance to engage the world in every arena has proven costly. "The church has feared and abdicated the marketplace," declares Robert Fraser, "lost its vision for marketplace evangelism, and therefore lost the very revival it seeks."¹¹⁹ Yet only when the church engages the marketplace can the function of the gifts match their work as evidenced in the life and ministry of Jesus, the pattern for every believer. Anyone who values the Scriptural promise that God has now poured out His Spirit upon all flesh (Acts 2:17) and distributed grace-gifts throughout His body (1 Cor. 12:7) must consider the implications of a gift-centered perspective on vocation.

The fullest understanding of vocation, then, recognizes that the means of work consists of the grace imparted when humans respond to God's call and function in the gifts of His Spirit. Only as believers work in grateful response to that call and in that strength

¹¹⁷ Terry L. Cross, *Answering the Call in the Spirit: Pentecostal Reflections on a Theology of Vocation, Work, and Life* (Cleveland, TN: Lee University Press, 2007), 53.

¹¹⁸ R. Paul Stevens, *Doing God's Business: Meaning and Motivation for the Marketplace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 177.

¹¹⁹ Robert E. Fraser, *Marketplace Christianity: Discovering the Kingdom Purpose of the Marketplace* (Kansas City, KS: Oasis House, 2004), 29.

expressed most fully through the charismata will work replicate the activity of God, evidence its inherent goodness, and reflect its eternal purpose.

The Goal of Work: Consummation

The goal of work remains a final dominant thread in much of the contemporary FAW literature. This is perhaps the most significant question regarding work. Certainly no one launches a business or hires an employee without having some purpose in mind. Moreover, any lack of understanding behind the purpose of an assigned task threatens to dishearten even the most motivated worker. But the day-to-day obligations of running a business or the sheer monotony of a predictable but necessary task can easily obscure the ultimate purpose behind the endeavor. For the business owner or the person sweeping the floors at night, no question carries more weight than the question of purpose.

Reflection upon the literature suggests that the goal or purpose of any work-related endeavor might best be seen on two levels. On a more immediate level, businesses exist to provide goods and services that result in human flourishing. Van Duzer makes two significant observations in this regard: First, note the absence of the language of profit from this purpose statement. Always significant, profit exists as the means by which businesses attract the capital needed to accomplish their purpose. However, “the mere fact that a reasonable rate of return for shareholders is a first-order constraint does not convert it into a purpose.”¹²⁰ In *Joy at Work*, author Dennis Bakke asks, “Why should enriching shareholders be more important than producing quality products and selling them to customers at fair prices? What logic says that a company should put creating value for shareholders ahead of

¹²⁰ Van Duzer, 162.

the economic well-being of its employees?”¹²¹ Indeed, the common misperception of profit as a purpose may provide some small portion of the fuel for James’s warning to those who speak of going “to this city or that city ... [to] carry on business and make money” (James 4:13). These people, James suggests, should seek to understand and submit to the will of the Lord more completely. Perhaps, beyond presumptuousness, they also lacked clarity of understanding regarding God’s intent for business.

Second, this goal of contributing to human flourishing attaches not only to customers but to employees, as well. Like any capital investment, human capital requires wise and careful stewardship so the One who invested said capital receives the good return He seeks. The many scriptural mandates related to stewardship demand the structuring of businesses in ways that provide opportunities for the flourishing of the business’s employees.¹²² Notably, the relational engagement that business itself demands of participants helps address the biblical priority that work be somehow communal in nature. So the more immediate goal for any business relates to providing goods and services that result in human flourishing on every level: owner, investor, employee, customer, and even within the host community itself.

A second goal, more visionary and long-term, goes further and holds rich promise for the elevation of even the most ordinary work into something of eternal significance. For the Christian, every resource committed to any business endeavor now exists to express, anticipate, and advance toward the full manifestation of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Ultimately, the goal of all legitimate work stands as the consummation of all things in Christ.

¹²¹ Dennis W. Bakke, *Joy at Work: A Revolutionary Approach To Fun on the Job* (Seattle, WA: PVG, 2006), 156.

¹²² For an insightful discussion, see Van Duzer, 41-43.

Too often, believers overlook the grand narrative of Scripture. Perhaps this reflects the error of this age, when “fewer and fewer people look to any coherent, linear narrative to give them meaning and fall back on fragmented and idiosyncratic stories and sensations.”¹²³ Regardless, conceptual limitations result, reshaping the Bible’s message and culminating in what Hugh Whelchel describes as a “two-chapter gospel.”¹²⁴ The sweeping chronicle of Scripture gets reduced to a brief tale of private sin and personal forgiveness. The grandeur of creation, the glory of consummation, and the connection of the people of God with it stand ignored. Absent the full influence of especially the biblical bookends of Genesis and Revelation, the story of God’s redemptive grace survives only as a truncated and diluted gospel.

By way of contrast, Christopher J. H. Wright announces the Scriptures’ panoramic perspective: “The whole Bible renders to us the story of God’s mission through God’s people in their engagement with God’s world for the sake of the whole of God’s creation.”¹²⁵ In other words, when believers read the entire story, they see the liberating act of God engages the totality of creation (Rom. 8:19-21), that God’s plan involves the whole world, from creation to completion. Only the entire story counteracts and corrects an otherwise incomplete and inadequate gospel.

Likewise, inaccurate understandings of the believer’s eternal destiny generally characterize this partial gospel, pointing the believer toward an eternity centered on heaven

¹²³ Philip Greenslade, *A Passion for God’s Story: Discovering Your Place in God’s Strategic Plan* (Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 2002), 24.

¹²⁴ Whelchel, 9.

¹²⁵ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 51.

and utterly void of earth. Randy Alcorn suggests that the Scriptures offer a different perspective:

Earth was made for people to live on, and people were made to live on Earth. According to the prophets, the apostle Peter, and Christ himself, our destiny is to live forever on a restored and renewed Earth. ... God's Kingdom and dominion are not about what happens in some remote, unearthly place; instead, they are about what happens on the earth, which God created for His glory.¹²⁶

Indeed, the Scriptures promise that someday Christ's reign of righteousness on the earth will be without rival, that this globe will experience transformation and inclusion as part of "a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells" (2 Pet. 3:13).

Compellingly, however, the Scriptures also testify that, in some measure, this transformation has already begun in the appearing of Jesus the Righteous King and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon His Church, the redeemed. "The Kingdom of God," David Doty announces, "is wherever God reigns, where His will is carried out and His purposes fulfilled."¹²⁷ In Christ and the Spirit, the age to come has invaded the age that is.

Through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, God's people participate with Him in the present advance of His Kingdom on this earth, even in their work. Van Duzer describes this as "the real wonder of the story ... that here and now, this very new creation is already breaking into the world in which we live. As disciples of Jesus we are ... invited to share in God's shalom-restoring work."¹²⁸ Volf likewise describes the believer's work as an "active anticipation of the *transformatio mundi*"¹²⁹—the transformation of this world promised at

¹²⁶ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, Hardcover ed. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2004), 91, 94.

¹²⁷ David B. Doty, *Eden's Bridge: The Marketplace in Creation and Mission* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 35.

¹²⁸ Van Duzer, 82.

¹²⁹ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 102.

Christ's appearing. N. T. Wright adds his voice to the chorus, affirming that "Jesus's resurrection is the beginning of God's new project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven but to colonize earth with the life of heaven."¹³⁰

No distinctions exist regarding the efficacy of white-collar work over blue-collar or of the entrepreneur versus the night-shift security guard. The biblical revelation of God's abounding grace testifies that each one enjoys the same abundant measure of God's equipping Spirit as any other (cf. Acts 2:17-18) and that with it comes the same opportunity to draw eternal realities into this present age through any labor offered "as working for the Lord" (Col. 3:23).

Even working in cooperation with the Spirit, human effort does not produce this new creation. It remains the gift of God. The most ardent premillennialist, then, may embrace convictions regarding the present reality of the Kingdom without falling into a theology suggesting believers somehow will usher in the fullness of the Kingdom apart from Christ's appearing. Volf clarifies that Christ's coming Kingdom remains fully His gift while humanity's work to that end continues as a fitting and biblical response:

The origin and character of the 'New Jerusalem' show that the new creation as a whole is fundamentally a gift, and the primary human action in relation to it is not doing but 'waiting' (2 Pet. 3:12; cf. Matt. 6:10; Rev. 22:17). But one should not confuse waiting with inactivity. In the New Testament the injunction to wait eagerly for the kingdom is not opposed to the exhortation to *work diligently for the kingdom*.¹³¹

The privilege of every worker, then, and the goal of all labor, remain, facilitating the in-breaking and manifestation of Christ's reign on the earth through Spirit-empowered

¹³⁰ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 293.

¹³¹ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 100.

endeavors. Restored to relationship with God, humanity returns to the garden, as it were, not merely to maintain it, but as workers formed in the image of God, to cultivate creatively this world toward the consummation of all things in Christ as described in Scripture's closing chapters.

Any careful reading of Revelation makes clear that a restful return to Eden is not the Creator's final goal for His creation. "New Jerusalem reminds us that ... we are not called to find a way back to the garden. We are called into the complexity, intensity and messiness of the city."¹³² Even the results of earthly labors will not be lost,¹³³ but rather redeemed, transformed, and rewarded by the Father with the opportunity for more labor—"ruling over cities, judging angels, wearing crowns, and reigning with Christ."¹³⁴

Indeed, throughout eternity work continues as God's gift to humanity. "The central metaphor for Christian hope in the Book of Revelation is not a lazy pastoral scene, but a renewed city; a place of human work, built by human hands, restored and reclaimed by God's work."¹³⁵ Scott Rae notes the hint of this working future even in the eschatological promise of Isaiah 2:4: "In the 'kingdom come,'" Rae announces, "we'll beat our swords into plowshares and our spears into pruning hooks—the implements of work!"¹³⁶ Human labor today anticipates and expresses that continuing work the redeemed will engage, even when they reign with Christ in His Kingdom come.

¹³² Van Duzer, 87–88.

¹³³ For more information, see Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 89-98 and Doty, *Eden's Bridge*, 41-44.

¹³⁴ Rude, 228.

¹³⁵ David H. Jensen, *Responsive Labor: A Theology of Work*, Ann. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 26.

¹³⁶ Scott Rae, "A Theology of Work," (lecture, Acton University, Grand Rapids, MI, June 15, 2012).

Biblically, then, work replicates the activity of God, stewarding entrusted resources in cooperative and sustainable ways. God's people recognize the impact of sin on work, but understand the inherent goodness of God's gift of work that even sin cannot eradicate. Still, they understand that relationship with God, not work, remains the source of true identity and personal wholeness. Out of that relationship with God comes an understanding of His calling and empowerment for work, both broadly, in terms of a life's vocation, and more fluidly in terms of the capacity of the Spirit to empower for whatever task may be at hand. By means of that Spirit, all work becomes an expression and an anticipation of Christ's coming Kingdom, where the privilege of work will continue in service to His eternal and creation-encompassing reign.

Conclusion

Perhaps no arena of Christian life reflects a greater need for revitalization or holds more promise for initiating meaningful and widespread transformation than the sphere of ordinary human work. Too often, the church readily celebrates a rich sense of calling for those who find their delight in the service of the church gathered, but fails to celebrate, instruct, or encourage the sense of calling for those whose delight is to serve in that place where the church most desperately needs to be alive and engaged. Contemporary studies reveal both the consistent decrease in the amount of time typical believers have to invest in church-related meetings and the consistent increase in the number of hours people spend at work each week. An obvious solution—and perhaps one hinted at when Jesus instructed His followers to “ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Luke 10:2)—must involve instructing, encouraging, and releasing God's people to understand the significance of their work in light of a comprehensive understanding of the

gospel. This remains true regardless of calling, title, or station. From the owner-entrepreneur to the temporary hire making minimum wage, believers must renew and strengthen an understanding of their place as God's representative workers, anticipating and establishing His Kingdom through faithful labors.

CHAPTER 4: DESCRIPTION OF FIELD PROJECT

Introduction

Building upon the insights gleaned from the literature review as described in chapters 2 and 3, the field project consisted of two related pursuits. First, the work- and faith-related perceptions of blue- and white-collar workers were compared and contrasted through the analysis of data from a national assessment instrument. Second, that information was combined with other project research to create ministry tools designed to establish and strengthen the understanding of work-faith relationships among blue-collar workers. These resources were field tested through implementation in a local church setting. This chapter details the preparation and execution of the project, summarizes the results of the project, and offers thoughts on the project's contribution to ministry.

Preparation of the Project

The preparation of the project was accomplished in two distinct phases: (1) Data Assessment and (2) Field Intervention. The next two subsections detail these processes.

Data Assessment

Measurement Instrument

The Discipleship Assessment™ from Discipleship Dynamics¹ served as the measurement tool for work-related attitudes among blue-collar and white-collar workers for

¹ Johan Mostert, "Holiness as a Function of Psycho-behavioral Monitoring and Spiritual Mentoring: The *Talmideem Agenda* Research Project" (presented at the 42nd Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Seattle, WA, March 23, 2013), and Johan Mostert, "Outcomes-based Research on Spirit-filled

this project. Jefferson Assembly of God was one of six churches involved in the reliability assessment phase of the development of this new instrument. Discipleship Assessment™ measures five broad discipleship dimensions and forty specific outcomes of discipleship. The data for the validity and internal reliability of this instrument is high.² For this study only the responses to the eighty-three questions related to the dimensions of faith and work were analyzed.

Sample

Of the initial 319 Discipleship Assessment™ participants, 128 people identified themselves as white-collar workers while fifty-three identified as blue-collar. Given the disparity in the number of participants from each category, and in order to provide equitable groupings for analysis, several steps were taken with the data before analysis. First, all participants not working full-time were eliminated, leaving eighty-three white-collar workers and thirty-one blue-collar workers. Next, the records of white-collar workers were randomly deleted, first by eliminating every second participant in the data list (beginning with the second participant listed) and then by deleting every fourth participant (beginning with the first participant listed). After completing those two steps, the records of thirty-one full-time white-collar workers remained, matching the number of full-time blue-collar workers who completed the assessment.

Discipleship: Progress Report (Year II)” (presented at the 43rd Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Springfield, MO, March 6, 2014).

² Mostert, “Outcomes-based Research.”

Data Analysis

Each question was answered on a seven-point Likert Scale. The averages were computed separately for every answer, and the results of the averages obtained by white-collar workers were compared to those of blue-collar workers. When the average scores between the two groups differed by 10 percent or more, it was deemed that a significant difference existed in the average scores between the two groups. Tables 1 and 2 list those statements where the mean responses between the two groups were significant. Table 1 shows statements perceived by blue-collar workers to be less characteristic of themselves, while Table 2 shows those statements they perceived to be more characteristic of themselves.

Table 1. Statements Less True of Blue-Collar Workers by a Difference of 10 Percent or More³

	<i>Assessment Statement</i>	<i>Mean White Collar Response</i>	<i>Mean Blue Collar Response</i>	<i>Numerical Difference</i>	<i>Percentage Difference</i>
A	I feel like I'm on a "divine mission" when I'm at work.	2.96	4.42	1.46	21%
B	My debt is under control.	2.43	3.65	1.21	17%
C	I understand the competitive advantage that my company has.	2.71	3.79	1.08	15%
D	My career has become a "divine mission."	3.01	3.92	0.91	13%
E	My work provides me a sense of purpose in life.	2.82	3.67	0.85	12%
F	I don't really have any contact with poor people.	4.25	5.06	0.81	12%
G	I have a good grip on the future challenges that face my field of work.	2.37	3.16	0.79	11%
H	I feel like a "shepherd" for other disciples.	3.09	3.88	0.79	11%
I	God has called me into the career that I am in now.	2.67	3.35	0.68	10%
J	The primary purpose in my career is to make a difference for others.	2.42	3.09	0.67	10%

³ This table is an abbreviated version of Table 1 in Appendix A, which provides the complete list of assessment questions.

Table 2. Statements More True of Blue-Collar Workers by a Difference of 10 Percent or More⁴

	<i>Assessment Statement</i>	<i>Mean White Collar Response</i>	<i>Mean Blue Collar Response</i>	<i>Numerical Difference</i>	<i>Percentage Difference</i>
K	I believe trying to play the good guy in business will harm profitability.	6.39	5.51	0.88	13%
L	I would rather our youth participate in gospel outreach than in community service.	5.27	4.45	0.81	12%
M	I often wish I could have a clearer understanding of my gifts and talents.	3.99	3.20	0.80	11%

Findings

Overall, the results of the data align with the expectations held when approaching this project. A review of the data prompts four observations. First, and most striking among all the results, blue-collar workers consistently indicated less awareness of any certain calling in their work than did white-collar workers. The following statements—six out of the thirteen statements for which significant differences exist—all relate to a lack of a sense of divine purpose on the job:

- I feel like I’m on a “divine mission” when I’m at work.
- My career has become a “divine mission.”
- My work provides me a sense of purpose in life.
- God has called me into the career that I am in now.
- The primary purpose in my career is to make a difference for others.
- I often wish I could have a clearer understanding of my gifts and talents.

In each case, blue-collar workers revealed a more limited perception of divine mission, calling, and purpose, and likewise a more limited understanding of their gifts and

⁴ This table is an abbreviated version of Table 2 in Appendix A, which provides the complete list of assessment questions.

talents, than their white-collar counterparts. A key challenge of the field intervention, then, became connecting what might be perceived as ordinary or mundane work to God's divine purpose. The biblical record of Adam fulfilling God's mandate by cultivating a garden, the hands-on nature of Bezalel and Oholiab's craftsmanship, and Paul's exhortation to slave laborers in Colossians 3 all took on deepened significance as a result.

The second most prominent distinction relates to the first, reflecting a potential lack of connection on the part of blue-collar workers with their workplaces and perhaps with others in the workplace. Blue-collar workers consistently perceived the following statements as less true of themselves than did white-collar workers:

- I understand the competitive advantage that my company has.
- I have a good grip on the future challenges that face my field of work.
- I feel like a "shepherd" for other disciples.

With these statements, blue-collar workers indicated less understanding of their company's competitive advantage, less understanding of future job-related challenges, and less awareness of any personal leadership influence toward other followers of Christ who share the workplace with them. To some degree, a white-collar worker might rightly be expected to have a broader perspective on the company as a whole and the unique opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. Equally, a white-collar worker might be more likely to carry supervisory responsibilities on the job and therefore live with a greater awareness of his or her circle of influence.

Still, these distinctions highlight the risk of the blue-collar laborer reducing his or her work to nothing more than the machine-like completion of a series of assigned tasks in order to receive a paycheck. The Scriptures present work differently, giving rich dignity to all

honest labor and tying the work of even the least-esteemed workhand to the greater work of God. Here, then, the biblical revelation of God himself as a worker and of humanity's capacity for work as a reflection of His image carry deepened consequence. Additionally, the role of the Holy Spirit in calling and equipping individuals according to God's plan adds eternal value to every job. Moreover, positive relational influence on the job should be capitalized upon regardless of whether a worker carries supervisory responsibilities or not. During the field intervention, Adam's role as a creator of culture helped address this challenge.

Responses to statements B and F—"My debt is under control" and "I don't really have any contact with poor people"—highlighted the financial challenges sometimes experienced more acutely in the blue-collar context. The strong concern about debt among blue-collar workers confirmed the conclusion of chapter 3 that financial security remains one of the weightiest issues within the blue-collar community. Perhaps as a result of those financial constraints, blue-collar workers are also more likely to have had contact with poor people. While all of this accentuates the challenges of blue-collar workers in terms of financial limitations and may point to the need for additional practical instruction in matters like money management, it also suggests that the blue-collar community itself may serve as a significant avenue for ministry among the poor through pre-existing relational connections.

To the advantage of such ministry, the Scriptures clearly declare that while the wealthy may face unique challenges that hinder their embrace of the gospel (Luke 18:25), the Kingdom is within close reach of the poor (6:20). The harvest may be most plentiful (10:2) among those who possess the least. Additionally, as a heightened awareness of the

significance of human labor impacts job performance positively, the potential exists to see “redemption and lift”⁵ improve the financial status of blue-collar laborers.

In another interesting disparity, responses to statement K revealed that blue-collar workers are more likely than white-collar workers to believe that “trying to play the good guy in business will harm profitability.” This attitude may issue from the somewhat rough-and-tumble nature of blue-collar culture in general, where a sense of life as a fight for survival dominates. This view may also, however, reflect a focus on conflict over labor rights within a company itself more than a focus on the fight for any company’s success in the marketplace at large. Blue-collar workers often view the world through the lens of labor-management battles. Addressing the limited sense of connection that blue-collar workers feel with their company overall may form part of the solution here.

The blue-collar propensity for simple and direct communication appears to show up in statement L, where—significantly more than white-collar workers—blue-collar workers agreed, “I would rather our youth participate in gospel outreach than in community service.” In the same way that broad generalizations sometimes describe the whole world for the blue-collar worker, life is often viewed in fairly distinct categories—for example, the rich versus the poor, labor versus management, or liberal versus conservative. Here, the blue-collar workers see a strong distinction between gospel outreach and community service. They do not as easily recognize, understand, or embrace holistic and nuanced approaches. This project addresses those challenges by connecting and overlapping otherwise distinct concepts like work, ministry, and calling.

⁵ Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 3rd ed., rev. ed. C. Peter Wagner (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 209.

Analysis of the data, then, suggests that the church's greatest challenge involves helping the blue-collar worker understand and develop his or her sense of divine calling and purpose. Concurrent with that challenge, the typical blue-collar worker needs help understanding the unique capacities afforded him or her both in the form of natural talents present at birth and fresh gifts resulting from the presence and anointing of the Holy Spirit. Additionally, blue-collar laborers would benefit from a fresh understanding of ministry opportunities and a more holistic conception of ministry.

Field Intervention

The Review of Published Research

Research into the biblical foundation for a theologically-grounded understanding of work shaped the creation of project-related ministry tools used in this intervention. Four key themes emerged as central components behind any biblical perspective on work. The literature review revealed that (1) work is not something to endure or avoid, but something to embrace and enjoy as God's gift to humanity and as an expression of His image and dominion; (2) Sabbath rest serves an essential role in humanity's experience of work, providing a necessary counterbalance against humanity's propensity to give work unwarranted significance; (3) the Holy Spirit's calling and equipping interlaces the work of every willing individual with the work of God himself and of others toward accomplishing God's eternal plan, and (4) work gives humanity the opportunity to prophetically express the ultimate consummation of all things in Christ in ways that God himself will redeem, refine, and renew in His Kingdom come.

A review of blue-collar-related contemporary literature focused on identifying key characteristics common among blue-collar workers and exploring both the historical and

current relationship between blue-collar workers and the Faith at Work movement. Although economic developments and technological advances have resulted in significant changes within the blue-collar environment over the past fifty years, a review of contemporary literature suggests that blue-collar workers retain the same sort of down-to-earth qualities present since the earliest days of the labor movement. In short, blue-collar workers appreciate direct communication, hold close-knit loyalties, and value hands-on practicality.

Additionally, blue-collar workers share three common concerns: job security, financial stability, and the challenge of building a positive personal identity in a milieu often filled with mixed messages regarding significance and worth. All of these factors shaped the development of ministry tools employed in the local church field project.

The Scheduling of Field Intervention

The intervention design originally called for a ten-week project—four consecutive weeks of Sunday services trailed by six weeks of small group follow-up. However, when research highlighted the strong blue-collar partiality toward brevity of speech and practical application, I compacted the Sunday services and small-group follow-up meetings into a single, more intense, four-week process. The shorter timeframe also simplified plugging the intervention itself into the broader church calendar. The project was also compacted and simplified by replacing planned focus groups with informal, one-on-one conversations with blue-collar workers. These conversations confirmed the conclusions drawn in chapter 3 regarding the nature and challenges of blue-collar labor.

Considering potential dates for the field project, I eliminated the summer months of June, July, and August, as well as the winter months of November and December due to competing activities. Between the remaining spring and fall options, the fall was preferred

due to the density of pre-existing activities on the spring calendar. Having assessed the best fit for the church calendar overall, the intervention began on September 28, 2014.

The Development of Field Project Materials

Development of the field project materials focused on introducing blue-collar workers to the truths uncovered in the biblical-theological review while giving particular attention to the unique qualities revealed in the contemporary literature review and the comparative analysis of assessment data. I developed four sermons, each focusing on one of the four biblical themes unearthed during the work-related biblical-theological research. From those sermons, I also created discussion guides designed to expand on and reinforce key themes from the messages through small-group interaction. A brainstorming session with church staff members produced the series title: *9 – 5 ‘til Kingdom Come*. We chose this title in an effort to tie the ordinary workday to Christ’s eternal Kingdom. Additionally, this title was chosen in hopes that, through participation in the project process, what might have sounded foreboding upon first reading—the thought of laboring without end—would become, ultimately, a confident declaration of human work as a prophetic anticipation and expression of Christ’s Kingdom.

A project graphic was created for all printed materials and electronic media used throughout the campaign. In an effort to mix the often manual and mechanical nature of blue-collar labor with the future-orientation of Kingdom work, the graphic featured “9 – 5” in a handwriting-styled font and the words “‘til Kingdom Come” in an LCD-display type font layered over an electronically enhanced representation of mechanical levers and gears. Utilized in church publications, promotional posters, Facebook posts, sermon graphics, and

small-group discussion resources, the image visually connected the various elements of the project.

Preparation for the final Sunday service required the creation of a second project-related graphic. As part of that service, participants were commissioned for ministry in their workplaces much like a person might be ordained as part of a public worship service. Often, in the commissioning of ministerial professionals, candidates receive a shepherd's crook, an ordination stole, or some other token as a tangible reminder of those spiritually significant moments. For this project's commissioning service, a simple but emphasis-appropriate t-shirt was prepared as a sacred reminder for each participant.

The commissioning gift bore a logo designed to reinforce the instruction offered particularly during the second half of the project. Specifically, the third service for this project focused on work done in the empowerment of the Holy Spirit as evidenced by the Old Testament craftsmen Bezalel and Oholiab (Deut. 31:1-11). The final service focused on the reward promised in Scripture for work done "with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters" (Col. 3:23). In an effort to memorably connect the participants' commissioning experience in the final service with the pneumatological example of Deuteronomy 31 and the eschatological promise of Colossians 3, each participant received a denim-blue t-shirt featuring a screen-printed, pocket-sized logo. The logo featured the image of a crown and, below the crown in ornate script, the words "Bezalel & Oholiab." Below that, in smaller block letters, the shirt read "By Appointment to His Majesty the King." To the casual observer, the logo might appear to simply promote a quality-focused business; however, to the cognizant wearer the shirt provides a reminder that he or she, through Spirit-

empowered, Kingdom-focused work, serves the same eternal King and God-glorifying purpose as did Bezalel and Oholiab.

The development of project materials also required the creation of various paper forms, email lists, and electronic spreadsheets for the purpose of recruiting participants to the project and tracking their ongoing participation.

The Recruitment of Field Project Participants

I primarily recruited project participants from among the attendees of Jefferson Assembly of God in Meriden, Kansas. Given the breadth of job categories occupied by blue-collar workers, I only set two parameters: participants were to be employed thirty-two hours a week or more in a job not requiring a college degree. I recruited through announcements made during public services of the church, email appeals, and personal conversation with known contacts. A printed recruitment and response handout offered details on the expected level of involvement for participants and a perforated card for removal and submission by interested parties. Thirty-one different participants engaged the process on various levels. Ultimately, twenty-five individuals completed the project by participating in exit interviews designed to provide a qualitative assessment of the project.

Execution of the Project

The local church intervention phase launched on September 28, 2014, with that Sunday's morning service at Jefferson Assembly of God. Mid-week follow-up began that Tuesday, as small-group discussion opportunities for each sermon were available Tuesday and Wednesday evenings at 7:00 p.m. and the following Sunday morning at 9:00 a.m. throughout each week of the campaign. Evening meetings generally lasted an hour and a half while the Sunday morning sessions were limited to an hour. Participants had the option of

attending whichever follow-up session best fit their schedule. In the event of a Sunday morning absence, I asked the participants to listen to the message online the following week. Participants unable to attend a discussion session during any given week were asked to review the discussion questions privately.

The project's first week focused on Genesis 1-2:3 and "The Gift of Work." Examining the Scripture's creation account, participants were encouraged to recognize work as part of God's gift of a perfect world to His human creation, a reflection of what it means to be made in His image, and a means of filling and subduing the earth in His authority. The follow-up session for week one made use of a number of discussion questions and included a brief video by Andy Crouch titled *Stepping into Culture*.⁶ In the video, Crouch highlighted various ways in which the church has approached culture over the last century, but—building on Genesis 2 and Adam's responsibilities in the Garden of Eden—encouraged believers to embrace the priorities of creating and cultivating culture.

Week two also emphasized Genesis 2:2-3 and "The Gift of Rest," arguing that a biblical understanding of work remains incomplete apart from a biblical understanding of Sabbath rest. A brief video titled *Workaholic*⁷ introduced the Sunday morning message, which presented Sabbath rest as a form of testimony, an opportunity for celebration, a tool for building identity, and a prophetic expression of the eternal rest promised the people of God (Heb. 4:9).

⁶ "Stepping Into Culture by Andy Crouch," Q Ideas, accessed August 14, 2014, <http://old.qideas.org/video/stepping-into-culture.aspx/>.

⁷ "Work as Worship Video Kit with Matt Chandler, Norm Miller of Interstate Batteries and David Green of Hobby Lobby," Work as Worship Network, accessed August 4, 2014, <http://www.workasworshipnetwork.org/work-as-worship-video-kit-with-matt-chandler-norm-miller-of-interstate-batteries-and-david-green-of-hobby-lobby/>.

Having rooted humanity's work in the creation account, week three focused attention on "The Gift of Ability" and the role of the Holy Spirit in human work. The story of Bezalel and Oholiab in Exodus 31:1-11 introduced a message about the purposeful calling, abundant empowerment, and cosmic connection the Holy Spirit provides to humanity's work. This service also utilized a video testimony by actor Stephen Baldwin describing how a Spirit-empowered housekeeper led him and his wife to the Lord.⁸ The discussion group material connected all of this more explicitly to the theological concept of vocation.

Week four celebrated "The Gift of Future" and the eschatological promise of "an inheritance from the Lord" for labor offered "as working for the Lord, not for human masters" (Col. 3:23). The sermon particularly emphasized the concept of humanity's work as something the Lord "preserves, sanctifies and directs ... toward the future age of God's redemptive reign."⁹ As a celebration of human labor, the congregation was encouraged to "Wear your work clothes to Worship!"—dressing for church service as if it were an ordinary work day. At the close of this final service in the series, the thirty-one project participants were invited to present themselves before the congregation as the church's spiritual overseers gathered around them, laid hands on them, and commissioned them for ministry in their workplaces. Over the following week, the series concluded with discussion of Sunday's material in small-group follow-up meetings.

⁸ "Stephen Baldwin - I Am Second," I Am Second, accessed August 4, 2014, <http://www.iamsecond.com/seconds/stephen-baldwin/>.

⁹ Murray Dempster, "Christian Social Concern in Pentecostal Perspective" (presented at the 20th Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Lakeland, FL, 1991), 36.

Results of the Field Project

Three weeks after the conclusion of the field intervention, twenty-three participants reflected on their 9 – 5 *'til Kingdom Come* experiences in small-group and one-on-one interviews. Interviews were conducted using open-ended questions about project themes along with a checklist of key thoughts for noting congruent responses. The interviews were conducted in a variety of locations convenient to the participants, including the church facility, a local restaurant, and a workplace cafeteria. Each interview gave participants the opportunity to articulate their experiences as they desired while the interviewer listened for points of correspondence (or dissonance) between what was said and the primary emphases of the study series.

This qualitative assessment by way of interview responses showed a strong understanding of and appreciation for the materials presented along with a corresponding transformation of attitudes about work and its place in the life of faith. With regard to the emphasis of week one, presenting work as God's gift, one participant remarked, "This filled my understanding of work with a whole new purpose. I spent a long, stressful time lining up with corporate goals. Now I'm lined up with God's goals." A production line worker noted a fresh perspective, as well. "It's great to know I'm not just putting in my time," he announced. "I have a new awareness of purpose." A bank clerk announced succinctly, "My work became bigger." A print shop employee caught the connection between Adam's activity and his own: "By my work," he boasted, "I'm bringing things into being. Even if it's only cutting dog food labels, I'm creating." What had been merely a job for many became, instead, a means of expressing God's character and accomplishing God's purposes through work.

The conversation surrounding Sabbath rest during week two also sparked significant reflection and transformed action. One couple described how they were now choosing to

intentionally practice Sabbath rest by establishing certain non-negotiable boundaries for themselves. They had agreed together to make sure their Sabbath had a different character than other days. A machinist acknowledged a deeper understanding of the reasons for and principles behind Sabbath rest. “Life has changed to the point that Sunday isn’t the only day for the Sabbath,” he said. “For today’s schedules, it’s not so important the day of Sabbath but that you actually acknowledge the Sabbath.” Others commented on how what had been a ritualistic requirement was now becoming a treasured priority. “I had treated Sabbath as ‘got to’—as though I was going to work,” said one. “Now I realize ‘I get to.’” Another participant—a secretary—said about Sabbath observance, “I did it happily, but on autopilot. Now, I experience deliberately looking forward to ... to anticipating ... the refreshing.”

A number of participants were now considering the concept of the Sabbath from a new perspective and pondering what it ought to look like for them. My administrative assistant, in observing this process, made the following comment: “It seems as if, for these participants, it had always been something legalistic—something one had to do,” she observed. “Now, some were experiencing their new-found Sabbath freedom with a bit of anxiety. They were being forced to ask themselves, ‘What should Sabbath look like?’” In a culture that increasingly views every day as just like any other day, this study challenged workers to consider the implications of the biblical call to Sabbath rest.

The impact of week three, focusing on the equipping and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, seemed more difficult for participants to articulate. Men, in particular, found describing the place of the Holy Spirit in their work problematic. Still, the sessions carried impact. One young lady who after a fairly recent job change labeled her new job as “underwhelming” still described how the Holy Spirit was helping her recognize her gifts and

abilities through her employment. “Although this job is not what I imagined,” she shared, “through it the Holy Spirit has given me a fresh understanding of myself and who I am.” A young man described the work of the Holy Spirit this way: “He helps me to remember who I serve ... who’s my boss ... that I’m working for God and I want to please Him.” A heavy equipment operator summed up his on-the-job experience with the Holy Spirit by saying, “We were created to work. And work is worship. And the Holy Spirit is in our worship. Therefore He’s always on the job.” Although points of correspondence between the instruction offered and the comments of the participants interviewed seemed not as direct as some of the other emphases, still, participants found reason to celebrate a fresh awareness of connection between themselves and the activity of the Holy Spirit on the job.

Week four, on the other hand, carried particularly distinct and rich impact. Participants found the concept of a renewed earth (as part of a “new heaven and a new earth”) particularly compelling, especially when coupled with the idea that work today might somehow connect both to eternal reward and to continuing work in the age to come. Because of this fresh perspective on eternity, one participant—a truck driver by day and blue-grass musician by night—remarked, “I’m going to have to rewrite every gospel hymn I ever sang!” As a result of his new outlook, that worker was called into his boss’s office so that his supervisor could reprimand him—tongue-in-cheek—for being too happy on the job.

People were consistently taken aback by the thought that eternity might not involve so much an escape from this earth as the renewal of this earth and the continuing participation of the redeemed with it as part of God’s eternal plan. “I’d seen heaven as a giant sanctuary where we couldn’t help but stand and worship forever,” said one individual. “But the idea of work continuing in a new earth excites me!” Said another, “I was concerned about

being flat-out bored in heaven. I'm happy to know the value of work and that in heaven, I'll be busy!" A third participant—a custodian—announced with fresh understanding, "My work is part of something spectacular."

One laborer shared a fresh understanding of his responsibilities as a steward of the earth: "God didn't create the earth and all that's in it and say, 'It's no good—I hate it, but I'll use it for now.' No, he rejoiced over it ... and we have a responsibility in it now!" A construction company employee celebrated his new understanding of the connection between today and eternity: "Wow—I'm excited—excited that somebody would step away from the old to embrace the new. The box is open. We're in the game!" In the past, he said, "we've raced toward Sunday to receive a blessing, and thrown six perfectly good days away. It's all now!" As the project developed, the connection between today and eternity seemed the most important connection to form. Encouragingly, it appeared to be the insight that carried the most weight when the process was completed.

The Project's Contribution to Ministry

Over a century ago, Christian leaders who understood the implications of the gospel for every worker acted on behalf of the common laborer in the context of the workplace. As a result, work conditions improved, the workweek was reduced, on-the-job safety enhanced, job security strengthened, pay increased, and the American middle-class born. That biblically-rooted challenge of contemporary labor practices, paired with the harnessing of the American propensity toward productivity and creativity, resulted in national prosperity on levels never seen before or since. Certainly not every day was prosperous or trouble-free, but on the whole, America grew to a place of international leadership in large part through the labor of her people.

In more recent years, the connection between the workplace and the gospel has been largely forgotten. Lack of understanding, neglect of biblical truth, and broader cultural challenges to the Judeo-Christian heritage historically so characteristic of this nation have resulted in separating Sunday's worship from Monday's workplace. Where the sacred finds honor at all, it still often remains subject to the now-so-common sacred-secular divide. Where efforts are being made to restore those connections in the marketplace, the focus lies almost exclusively with business owners, entrepreneurs, and upper-level management—people with some level of liberty and autonomy to infuse their workplace with biblical values and a sense Christian mission.

This study set out to change that by renewing the faith-work connection for blue-collar laborers—people with workdays often characterized by limited workplace autonomy, undesirable and sometimes unsafe work environments, and employer practices that too often fail to recognize the humanity of employees and the dignity of honest labor. Although the challenges for the blue-collar worker may be different than they were a century or more ago, the biblical implications for every laborer remain just as significant and compelling. Moreover, if the glory of labor as the Scriptures portray it could once more capture the sleeping giant that is the American workforce, significant transformation would result on multiple levels. Not only would a new spiritual vitality infuse work, but common employer challenges like absenteeism, tardiness, and employee theft (of product, materials, or company time) would plummet and productivity would, of necessity, increase. The American economy, so marked by stagnation and lethargy in recent years, would, by default, awaken. The economic recovery sought so earnestly through political and financial manipulation would, instead, become a happy by-product of spiritual revitalization.

This project, in ways I am unaware of otherwise happening, offers a small and initial expression of how to initiate this spiritual rebirth. Rooted in the most common and basic entities—the eternal truth of Scripture, the dynamic organism called the local church, and the everyday American worker—this promise of national revitalization requires nothing that the most ordinary American community lacks. Because of that, although the present impact of this study remains limited, the potential for exponentially greater impact stands—and stands in a way that pleads for development and duplication. The day that every person who claims the name of Christ works as a Christian ought to work—“for the Lord, not for human masters” (Col. 3:23)—the world will be unable to ignore the transformation.

CHAPTER 5: PROJECT SUMMARY

Introduction

This chapter contains an evaluation of the 9 – 5 *'til Kingdom Come* field intervention and related project elements. These pages discuss the keys to the project's effectiveness, keys to the project's improvement, implications of the project, specific recommendations for local churches in light of this intervention experience, and specific recommendations for further study.

Evaluation of the Project

Keys to Project Effectiveness

This project proved successful on at least two counts. First, the analysis of Discipleship Assessment™ data confirmed the basic premise of the study itself and the conclusions drawn from the contemporary literature review. Second, the qualitative assessment of the field intervention suggests the process resulted in both transformed attitudes and new behaviors. At least three factors contributed positively toward the effectiveness of this project: Ready participants, pertinent information, and a contextualized presentation.

Ready Participants

The twenty-five participants who engaged the intervention process from its initiation through final post-process interviews did so eagerly and energetically. Contributing factors appear to include a clear delineation of expectations during the recruitment process, a sense

of affinity with other participants who were also part of the blue-collar sector, the appeal of assisting with a project believed to be significant, and the opportunity to examine a subject of interest in a familiar setting. Regardless of specific motivations, participants readily tackled the study material, schedule commitments, conversational opportunities, and challenges toward transformation this process entailed. Without ready participants, the intervention obviously would not have succeeded.

Pertinent Information

Every individual participant had good reason to engage the intervention process because he or she was a full-time employee. By implication, the subject matter of the study addressed pertinent information. Not every study a church leader conducts connects so readily with the felt needs of those who engage it. By addressing the topic of work—a subject already significant in the life of each participant—this study avoided one of the most challenging obstacles to effective interaction. Participants found the study relevant and stimulating in part because the subject matter was already significant and germane.

Contextualized Presentation

The value of efforts made to connect tangibly with a blue-collar context cannot be overstated. Although room for improvement in this regard still exists, a study that carries insight from Adam the Gardener, Bezalel the Craftsman, and Paul the Tentmaker—all of it rooted in the promise of Jesus the Carpenter—seems especially powerful when challenging people whose work is so often physical and tangible. Compacting the series to four weeks made the opportunity manageable for people who care most about practical application. Visual representations celebrated the manual and mechanical over the automated and informational. In a culture that often overlooks and even disparages the beauty of basic

human labor, celebrating a scriptural perspective on physical work connected powerfully with blue-collar people.

Keys to Project Improvement

While the success of the intervention exceeded my expectations, room for improvement certainly remains for future iterations. Further development of this project should focus on three key areas: layered accessibility, improved illustrations, and expanded assessment.

Layered Accessibility

The 9 – 5 *'til Kingdom Come* intervention introduced some heady theological concepts to workers who, as a rule, are inclined to engage the practical far more than the theoretical. Indeed, people sometimes enter the blue-collar workforce specifically because they do not enjoy the classroom setting and see little value in “book learning.”¹ Asking blue-collar workers, then, to sit and discuss the significance of the *imago Dei* or how their work might serve as “kingdom-signifying deeds of anticipatory transformation”² requires a substantial mental and sociological leap. Although the participants in this project eagerly embraced the process and its challenges, finding ways to layer the introduction and development of these concepts into more “bite-sized” pieces would improve future efforts. If, for example, I could break down a key thought for the week into five or six questions to ponder, or illustrate these through five or six pithy quotations, I could disseminate these over

¹ To be clear, a disinterest in formal education *per se* is no measure of intelligence or lack thereof. For a brief but insightful column, see “Blue-Collar Brilliance: Questioning Assumptions about Intelligence, Work, and Social Class,” *The American Scholar*, accessed June 16, 2012, <http://theamericanscholar.org/blue-collar-brilliance/#.VHJ9Msma9bw>.

² Murray Dempster, “Christian Social Concern in Pentecostal Perspective” (presented at the 20th Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Lakeland, FL, 1991), 36.

the course of the week through texts or Facebook posts or email blasts. Participants could then receive daily challenges, but in smaller portions, to consider the implications and opportunities of their work, rather than experiencing something akin to “drinking from a fire hose” once or twice a week.

This suggestion, of course, raises the possibility of extending the intervention and distributing the instruction and interaction over a longer timeframe. It remains my opinion that an extended study series would have significantly less appeal to the typical blue-collar worker. In the local church setting, another alternative might be to divide the material into four (or more) separate studies perhaps accomplished over the course of several months, with each presentation allowing for review of any previous materials covered and a more moderately-paced introduction of new material.

Improved Illustrations

The issue of improved illustrations runs parallel to the concern over layered accessibility but seems substantial enough to warrant its own discussion. In short, this project would improve through better and more copious illustrations serving to connect the theological concepts introduced to the workaday world of the blue-collar laborer. Illustrations, someone has said, are like the windows of a house—they let in the light. They provide for “aha” moments where the implications of abstract thought are made practical. Especially when instructing and challenging people not always interested in or concerned with the world of ideas, effective illustrations stand essential to the revelation of biblical truth.

This challenge exists in part, perhaps, because the Church has not given enough attention to the eternal value of ordinary labor. Although business owners and entrepreneurs

are increasingly reminded that their work matters to God, few people declare that same reality to bus drivers or waitresses. Still, as Christian leaders give more time, thought, and attention to these truths, more anecdotes and illustrations of Kingdom advance through ordinary labor will surface, helping blue-collar laborers better connect biblical truth to time spent on the job. This project, and others like it, will benefit from improved illustrations.

Upgraded Assessment

The analysis of available Discipleship Assessment™ data confirmed the study's premise regarding distinctive differences between blue-collar and white-collar perceptions. Additionally, the qualitative assessment of the intervention itself suggested noteworthy progress toward a more biblical understanding of work on the part of participants. The intent of the original project design, however, involved measuring participant progress through quantitative assessments at both the beginning and completion of the field project. Although intervention participants were able to complete the Discipleship Assessment™ prior to the intervention launch, scheduling complications prevented the participants from completing post-field project assessments in a timely manner. Additionally, the Discipleship Assessment™ data made available for analysis, although national in scope, became a limited sample size when reduced to only full-time blue-collar workers and an equivalent number of white-collar workers.

This project would benefit, then, from upgraded assessment—not in terms of the Discipleship Assessment™ tool itself, which shows high validity and internal reliability—but in terms of a broader sample size for general analysis and by the opportunity to use the Discipleship Assessment™ tool as a quantitative post-assessment as part of any future

intervention projects. This study needs to be replicated on a larger pool of participants to confirm its findings and improve future interventions.

Implications of the Project

Several implications became apparent as this project moved toward completion. First, the Church has largely ignored the challenges and opportunities of the faith-work relationship in the blue-collar context. Most project participants had never particularly concerned themselves with developing a biblical perspective on work, save some who at least saw their jobs as an occasion to evangelize coworkers. Nor had their spiritual overseers pursued the relationship between faith and work as an instructional priority. Yet “adults employed full time in the U.S. report working an average of 47 hours a week.”³ In order for holistic discipleship to occur, churches and church leaders must more consistently help believers understand the importance of activities that will consume nearly one-third of the typical adult lifetime.

Second, believers seem eager to engage in work-faith related instruction and understand better the role of work in their lives. People are looking for significant purpose in what they already have to do with forty-plus hours of their week. The local church must capitalize on the readiness of Christ followers to understand better their work and its Kingdom significance.

Third, rich and enduring transformation seems sure to result from a workforce shaped and motivated by a biblical understanding of human labor. Believers who comprehend the magnitude of their work as revealed in Scripture—regardless of their job title or

³ Lydia Saad, “The ‘40-Hour’ Workweek Is Actually Longer—by Seven Hours,” Gallup, Inc., August 29, 2014, accessed September 2, 2014, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/175286/hour-workweek-actually-longer-seven-hours.aspx>.

description—will work more diligently, purposefully, and joyfully. Apart from the spiritual worth of labor offered in anticipation of Christ’s reward (Col. 3:23), such work holds promise as economically fruitful, socially responsible, morally acceptable, and relationally beneficial—in short, as comprehensively valuable. The worth of a renewed and deepened understanding of work by professing Christians cannot be overstated.

Recommendations for Jefferson Assembly of God and for Other Churches and Church Organizations

Recommendations for Jefferson Assembly of God

In view of the project overall and the field intervention in particular, three recommendations surface for the leadership and congregation of Jefferson Assembly of God. First, this church body must look for ways to weave the subject work more thoroughly into the fabric of the life of the church. Over the course of the intervention, it became clear that people within the congregation who knew each other by name or face still had no idea what type of work others they knew were involved in. For this congregation, the absence of such fundamental information about fellow believers raises significant questions about both the depth of fellowship shared within and across the congregation and how commonly the members of the congregation isolate faith from work. For the project participants in particular, merely conversing about the connections between faith and work in weekly follow-up discussions not only reduced the divide between the two subjects but also appeared to increase the relational intimacy within the groups. People became better friends when they talked together about their jobs.

Second, Jefferson Assembly of God must find ways to more consistently celebrate the ordinary labor of her blue-collar congregants. This fellowship annually acknowledges the teachers, administrators, and staff of the local school district with a back-to-school meal and

honors fire fighters, law enforcement, and other emergency personnel as part of an Independence Day celebration. Still, as this study reveals, all legitimate work bears Kingdom value. The labor of construction workers, nurses' aides, pressmen, cake decorators, and plumbers matters to Christ just as much as any other calling and should be celebrated as such by a church devoted to a biblical understanding of work.

Third, Jefferson Assembly of God should specifically pursue a better understanding of the Christian doctrine of vocation among its congregants. It does appear that many of the workers involved in this project engaged in the jobs they have not out of any awareness of God's call or divine direction, but for reasons of convenience ("the job was available"), vocational heritage ("it's what my father did"), or compensation ("I wanted a good retirement plan"). While any of those reasons may have their place, how much healthier it is for individual, community, and Kingdom alike if a person has an understanding of God's call and gifting for his or her work. While this observation might be especially significant in serving young people just entering the workforce, it holds merit across the entire spectrum of working-age congregants.

Recommendations for Other Churches and Church Organizations

Three recommendations come to mind, as well, for local churches and church organizations in general. First, church leaders must re-establish the biblical foundation regarding the nature, purpose, and worth of human labor. The Christian calling stretches far beyond working hard merely to be a good employee or supply for one's family, although these priorities no doubt have merit. Rather, all work stands tied to humanity's original and glorious commission to fill and subdue the earth as God's representative rulers (Gen. 1:27-28). More than that, humanity's work will continue as service to God throughout eternity

(Isa. 2:1-4; Rev. 5:10). Outside of eternal redemption itself, no subject carries greater importance.

Second, as was true for Jefferson Assembly of God in particular, churches and church organizations must elevate this biblical message in ways that celebrate not only the businessperson and entrepreneur but also the entire spectrum of human labor. As a rule, churches ignore work in ways that only reinforce the sacred-secular divide. In those contexts where work receives consideration, however, few appear to celebrate the auto mechanic, hotel maid, or short-order cook. By contrast, the Scriptures hold all legitimate work as eternally purposeful in Christ. The church must find ways to do the same consistently.

Third, pastors and denominational leaders should look for opportunities to familiarize themselves with the work environments of the people and communities they serve. Although company policies and security concerns sometimes complicate visits from non-employees, any Christian leader will be better equipped to connect biblical truth with workplace realities if he or she has visited with parishioners and other contacts in the actual workplace during working hours. Based on my experience throughout this project, when pastors and other Christian leaders express interest, people are pleased and eager to share the good and bad of workplace realities.

Recommendations for Future Study

Upon reflection, a broad spectrum of possibilities suggest themselves as subjects for future study in the arena of faith, work, and the blue-collar laborer. First, the culture and worldview of the blue-collar worker merits additional analysis. Although this study drew preliminary conclusions about the typical blue-collar worker and confirmed many of those conclusions through the analysis of relevant data, significant change continues to permeate

the blue-collar world. The outsourcing of manufacturing jobs, the explosion of service-sector work, the influx of both legal and illegal immigrants, the ebb and flow of union influence, and the broader relationship between blue-collar and white-collar employment nationally and internationally all continue to shape the American labor force. As diligently as a church might explore a local neighborhood being considered for a potential church plant or investigate a country with an eye on missionary outreach, the changing face of labor in the United States warrants continuing attention.

Second, the nature of work-faith relationships in the blue-collar context should expand far beyond the parameters of this study. David Miller labeled four quadrants of faith-related concern generally identified in work-faith research: ethics, evangelism, experience, and enrichment.⁴ With its emphasis on the meaning and significance of work, this study overwhelmingly focused on what Miller brands the “experience” quadrant. For whatever additional attention this quadrant ought to receive, each quadrant deserves its own attention in relation to the blue-collar worker.

Third, the Church should give additional attention to new ways of conveying work-faith insights into the world of blue-collar laborers. Although disseminating ancient theological truth or current research insights might most commonly be achieved through the printed word or other written media in a white-collar or academic context, blue-collar workers generally remain practically oriented toward “hands on” experience. Typically, a line worker will not want to read about a new tool; he or she wants to handle it, to use it, to see how it works. Perhaps further research could investigate the job-training methodologies

⁴ David W. Miller, *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 127.

of blue-collar employers or the cognitive processes that tend to distinguish blue-collar and white-collar workers and, in doing so, find more effective ways of sharing eternal truth within the blue-collar context.

Conclusion

A rich opportunity stands before the American Church. A dearth of instruction regarding the nature and purpose of work has left the American working public—and blue-collar workers particularly—uninformed and unchallenged with regard to the import of their daily labor. Still, like parched ground welcomes the rain, workers appear fully receptive to embracing the biblical truth about their work. Transitions within the blue-collar context have opened the door to fresh and deepened understandings even further.

The Scriptures carry a rich and unequalled message of work's origin, purpose, and promise. The Church must infuse the labor of those who claim the name of Christ with a significance befitting the call of Christ. No arena of life appears to hold greater potential for provoking life-giving transformation within multiple layers of American culture than does the biblically-rooted revitalization of the Christian worker. The opportunity stands for an extreme makeover of eternal significance. Let the work begin.

APPENDIX A: PROJECT-RELATED DISCIPLESHIP
ASSESSMENT™ DATA

Eighty-three work- and faith-related questions from the Discipleship Dynamics¹ Discipleship Assessment™ served as the measurement tool for work-related attitudes among blue-collar and white-collar workers for this project. The data of 319 Discipleship Assessment™ participants formed the base sample. Of those individuals, eighty-three were full-time white-collar workers and thirty-one were full-time blue-collar workers. From the data of those full-time workers only, the records of white-collar workers were randomly deleted until thirty-one workers from each group remained. This appendix offers demographic data and a summary of all work- and faith-related responses from those two groups.

Demographic Information

The following tables summarize demographic data for the groups of full-time blue-collar and white-collar workers who completed the Discipleship Dynamics Discipleship Assessment™ for this study. The tables address gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, whether or not the respondents have children living at home, educational achievement, local

¹ Johan Mostert, “Holiness as a Function of Psycho-behavioral Monitoring and Spiritual Mentoring: The *Talmideem Agenda* Research Project,” (presented at the Conference of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Seattle, WA, March 23, 2013), and Johan Mostert, “Outcomes-based Research on Spirit-filled Discipleship: Progress Report (Year II),” (presented at the Conference of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Springfield, MO, March 6, 2014).

church membership, church affiliation, and the number of years since the respondents first committed to serving the Lord.

<i>Gender</i>	<i>White Collar</i>	<i>Blue Collar</i>	<i>Total</i>
Male	14	17	31
Female	19	12	31

<i>Age</i>	<i>White Collar</i>	<i>Blue Collar</i>	<i>Total</i>
18 to 25	1	2	3
26 to 35	7	7	14
36 to 50	7	6	13
51 to 65	15	16	31
66 and older	1	0	1

<i>Ethnic Group</i>	<i>White Collar</i>	<i>Blue Collar</i>	<i>Total</i>
White	21	28	49
Hispanic/Latino	4	2	6
African American	3	0	3
Asian American	3	1	4
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0	0	0
More than one ethnicity	0	1	1

<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>White Collar</i>	<i>Blue Collar</i>	<i>Total</i>
Single	5	4	9
Married	20	21	41
Divorced	4	3	7
Widowed	2	0	2
Separated, not divorced	0	0	0
Living together, not married	0	3	3

<i>Children Living at Home</i>	<i>White Collar</i>	<i>Blue Collar</i>	<i>Total</i>
Yes	17	14	31
No	14	17	31

<i>Highest Educational Qualification</i>	<i>White Collar</i>	<i>Blue Collar</i>	<i>Total</i>
Less than high school	0	0	0
High school diploma or equivalent	8	13	21
Associates Degree or equivalent	1	7	8
BA Degree or equivalent	12	10	22
Graduate degree(s)	10	1	11

<i>Local Church Membership</i>	<i>White Collar</i>	<i>Blue Collar</i>	<i>Total</i>
Yes	25	29	54
I attend but not a member	3	2	5
I sometimes attend church services	1	0	1

No	1	0	1
No response	1	0	1

<i>Church Association</i>	<i>White Collar</i>	<i>Blue Collar</i>	<i>Total</i>
The Oaks Fellowship, Waxahachie, TX	11	10	21
Pocono Community Church, Mt Pocono, PA	7	11	18
Victory Christian Center, Poquoson, VA	0	1	1
Jefferson Assembly of God, Meriden, KS	4	7	11
Cristian Life Center, Santa Cruz, CA	0	0	0
Our Father's House, California, MD	0	0	0
Not part of any participating church	9	2	11

<i>Number of years since you committed your life to serving the Lord</i>	<i>White Collar</i>	<i>Blue Collar</i>	<i>Total</i>
Less than 2 years	2	4	6
3 to 5 years	0	7	7
6 to 15 years	7	4	11
16 to 25 years	8	5	13
More than 26 years	13	11	24
No response	1	0	1

Assessment Responses

In order to analyze differences in the perception of work- and faith-related issues, using the Discipleship Assessment™ data, the answers for each group's questions were averaged. The percentage of difference between each group's mean responses for each question was calculated relative to the potential Likert scale responses of 1 through 7. Note that for this survey, "1" equates to "just like me" and "7" equates to "not at all like me" with the result that a lower number indicates a higher level of agreement with the statement offered. When sorted, the results provided two lists of work-related assessment questions ordered from those with the greatest disparity of response to those with the least disparity of response between the two groups. Table 1 shows statements perceived by blue-collar workers to be less characteristic of themselves as opposed to white-collar workers' perceptions of themselves, while Table 2 shows those statements blue-collar workers perceived to be more characteristic of themselves.

Table 1. Statements Less True of Blue-Collar Workers than White-Collar Workers

<i>Assessment Statement</i>	<i>Mean White Collar Response</i>	<i>Mean Blue Collar Response</i>	<i>Numerical Difference</i>	<i>Percentage Difference</i>
I feel like I'm on a "divine mission" when I'm at work	2.96	4.42	1.46	21%
My debt is under control	2.43	3.65	1.21	17%
I understand the competitive advantage that my company has	2.71	3.79	1.08	15%
My career has become a "divine mission"	3.01	3.92	0.91	13%
My work provides me a sense of purpose in life	2.82	3.67	0.85	12%
I don't really have any contact with poor people	4.25	5.06	0.81	12%
I have a good grip on the future challenges that face my field of work	2.37	3.16	0.79	11%
I feel like a "shepherd" for other disciples	3.09	3.88	0.79	11%
God has called me into the career that I am in now	2.67	3.35	0.68	10%
The primary purpose in my career is to make a difference for others	2.42	3.09	0.67	10%
I like to solve complex problems	2.29	2.95	0.65	9%
My work helps me to live out my purpose in life	2.84	3.48	0.64	9%
I am very disciplined in my financial affairs	3.00	3.63	0.63	9%
I watch over the assets of my organization as if they were my own	2.00	2.63	0.63	9%
My spouse and I really appreciate one another's ministries	2.41	2.97	0.56	8%
My spouse and I support one another's ministries	2.11	2.66	0.56	8%
I live within my budget	2.39	2.93	0.54	8%
I think evangelism should receive more attention than social services to the poor	4.10	4.63	0.54	8%
I feel like I have been sent as an ambassador of the Kingdom to my work	2.76	3.28	0.52	7%
I can easily list my top strengths and weaknesses	2.08	2.59	0.52	7%
My spouse and I complement one another's ministries	2.61	3.11	0.49	7%
I complement my shortcomings by working in a team	2.89	3.38	0.48	7%
Even when they're absent my bosses and co-workers know I am managing the assets well	1.64	2.12	0.48	7%
I experience a sense of calling in my career	2.85	3.30	0.45	6%
I am constantly learning more about my field of work	2.24	2.67	0.43	6%

I feel responsible to make my community a better place to live for all	2.94	3.36	0.43	6%
I believe recycling is a waste of time	5.41	5.83	0.43	6%
God has a purpose to fulfill through me in my current career	2.25	2.65	0.39	6%
I have a creative imagination for the demands that my work places on me	2.88	3.26	0.38	5%
My ministry gifts bring a sense of God's "shalom" (presence) into my workplace	2.88	3.25	0.37	5%
My spouse and I each have a sense of calling	2.71	3.07	0.36	5%
It's better for me to rather work alone than to try to reach consensus in a group	4.30	4.66	0.36	5%
I believe all forms of legitimate work contribute to kingdom outcomes	2.15	2.51	0.36	5%
I often think up new ways of doing things	2.59	2.92	0.33	5%
Investing in my direct reports is just as important to me as the company "bottom line"	2.93	3.25	0.31	4%
I work best when I work alone	3.72	4.02	0.30	4%
I believe a certain amount of ruthlessness is required to succeed in secular work	5.67	5.97	0.30	4%
Helping people discover their personal calling energizes me	2.52	2.78	0.26	4%
I often give money away	2.71	2.93	0.22	3%
I have a good idea how my field of work should position itself for the future	2.48	2.69	0.21	3%
I am an original thinker when it comes to solving problems.	2.72	2.91	0.18	3%
I'm best at resolving complex problems when I'm working in a team	2.98	3.15	0.16	2%
I can't be successful in business today without bending the rules a bit	5.98	6.12	0.14	2%
I enjoy working together in a group	2.42	2.56	0.14	2%
My work is an integral part of God's purpose in the world	3.17	3.31	0.14	2%
My colleagues think highly of my work	2.11	2.25	0.14	2%
I like to find better ways to do things at work	2.02	2.15	0.13	2%
I know God really cares about the work that I do	1.88	2.01	0.13	2%
I believe my community would suffer were it not for the civic groups that are there	3.34	3.47	0.13	2%
I have a good understanding of my personal strengths	2.37	2.46	0.09	1%
I often bring words of comfort or exhortation to my colleagues at work	2.32	2.41	0.09	1%

I exceed the expectations of my boss (or supervisor)	2.22	2.30	0.09	1%
Younger Christians look to me for guidance	3.28	3.36	0.08	1%
I am a completely trustworthy employee	1.37	1.43	0.06	1%
I am aware of my unique gifts and talents	2.95	3.00	0.05	1%
I come up with new and different ways of doing things	2.76	2.79	0.03	0%
My spouse and I share a sense of mission together	2.78	2.80	0.02	0%

Table 2. Statements More True of Blue-Collar Workers than White-Color Workers

<i>Assessment Statement</i>	<i>Mean White Collar Response</i>	<i>Mean Blue Collar Response</i>	<i>Numerical Difference</i>	<i>Percentage Difference</i>
I believe trying to play the good guy in business will harm profitability	6.39	5.51	-0.88	13%
I would rather our youth participate in gospel outreach than in community service	5.27	4.45	-0.81	12%
I often wish I could have a clearer understanding of my gifts and talents	3.99	3.20	-0.80	11%
I think getting ahead at work sometimes requires stepping over people.	6.12	5.55	-0.57	8%
I'm an asset to my boss (or supervisor)	2.00	1.61	-0.39	6%
I don't have a clue about my unique gifts and talents	5.42	5.13	-0.29	4%
The Holy Spirit uses me as an instrument of God's grace at work	2.96	2.69	-0.27	4%
I think a clean environment is good management of God's creation	2.31	2.07	-0.24	3%
I volunteer in my community because it promotes the "common good"	3.41	3.17	-0.24	3%
I care about conservation	2.77	2.53	-0.24	3%
I have an active role in community organizations	4.35	4.13	-0.22	3%
I value caring for the environment	2.71	2.50	-0.21	3%
I feel church social outreaches should always be accompanied by a gospel service	4.23	4.03	-0.20	3%
I work hard at making my community a better place to live	3.85	3.68	-0.16	2%
I understand very well the field of work that I am in	1.80	1.64	-0.16	2%
When I'm finished with a task at work I go and find other things to do	2.10	1.96	-0.14	2%
I promote recycling	3.30	3.16	0.14	2%
I invest a lot in the lives of younger Christians	3.44	3.31	-0.12	2%

In order to succeed in my work I sometimes have to compromise my standards	5.89	5.81	0.08	1%
I am a mentor to others	3.02	2.99	-0.03	0%
I don't succumb to impulse buying of large, unbudgeted items	2.62	2.59	-0.02	0%
I would prefer to invest my tithes in evangelism over poverty relief	4.36	4.34	-0.02	0%
My bosses and co-workers trust me with company assets	1.68	1.68	-0.01	0%

APPENDIX B: FIELD INTERVENTION PARTICIPATION LEVELS

The following chart outlines participation levels throughout the field intervention and identifies a job title and tenure for each project participant.

Participant #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Pre-Assessment	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Week 1 – Sermon	O	O	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	O	O	O	O	O	O	S
Week 1 – Discussion	W	T	S	W	W	T	T	W	W	P	S	P	S	P	W	W
Week 2 – Sermon	S	S	S	S	O	S	S	S	S	O	S	S	S	O	S	O
Week 2 – Discussion	T	T	S	W	W	T	T	W	W	S	S	P	W	P	W	W
Week 3 – Sermon	S	S	S	S	S	O	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	X	S	S
Week 3 – Discussion	T	T	W	W	T	P	T	P	T	P	S	S	W	S	W	W
Week 4 – Sermon	S	O	S	S	S	O	S	S	O	O	S	S	S	S	S	O
Week 4 – Discussion	W	T	W	W	T	W	T	P	W	P	T	P	S	X	W	W
Assessment Interview	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y
Years on the Job	14	23	0.5	17	1	20	0.3	2	8	2	1	2	3	2	1	2
Job Title	Pipefitter	Stock handler	Heavy Equipment Operator	Procurement Officer	Caregiver	Journeyman Lineman	Teller	Custodian	Registrar	Stocker/Clerk	Cutter	Accountant	Runner	Freight Broker	Cake Decorator	Agent Service Representative

Key: Y = Yes, N = No, S = Sunday, T = Tuesday, W = Wednesday, O = Listened to sermon online, P = Reviewed discussion material privately, X = Did not listen to sermon/read discussion material

Participant #	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
Pre-Assessment	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Week 1 – Sermon	S	S	O	O	S	S	S	S	S	O	S	S	O	S	S
Week 1 – Discussion	W	T	S	W	W	W	W	W	W	T	X	W	P	W	W
Week 2 – Sermon	S	S	O	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	O	O	S	S
Week 2 – Discussion	W	T	T	W	W	W	W	T	T	T	X	W	P	W	S
Week 3 – Sermon	S	S	O	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	O	O	S
Week 3 – Discussion	W	T	W	W	W	T	T	T	T	T	X	W	P	X	W
Week 4 – Sermon	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	X	S	O	S	S
Week 4 – Discussion	W	T	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	T	X	W	P	T	W
Assessment Interview	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N
Years on the Job	3	2	13	11	5	30	5	1	3	17	6	17	9	0.5	27
Job Title	Line Lead	Production Laborer	Developer/Computer Tech	Clinical Research Coordinator	Owner/Operator	Supervisor	Para-educator	Ad Sale Executive	Supervisor	Machinist	Paraprofessional	Housekeeper	Journeyman Plumber	Driver	Pipefitter

Key: Y = Yes, N = No, S = Sunday, T = Tuesday, W = Wednesday, O = Listened to sermon online, P = Reviewed discussion material privately, X = Did not listen to sermon/read discussion material.

APPENDIX C: FIELD INTERVENTION RECRUITMENT

MATERIAL AND GRAPHICS

The recruitment card explaining field intervention participant commitments and providing a detachable response card, as well as the “9 – 5 ‘til Kingdom Come” and “Bezalel and Oholiab” t-shirt graphic are reproduced below.

Recruitment Card

I'm looking for 30 people who meet two criteria and will complete four tasks.

The Two Criteria:

1. Be working more than 32 hours a week.
2. Employed in a job(s) that doesn't require a college degree for employment.

The Four Tasks:

1. Complete an online survey measuring your opinion about spiritual things.
2. Participate in all four Sunday morning services in September.
(For people who can't be present on Sunday morning, listening to a recording of the service is an alternative.)
3. Participate in 4 weeknight/Saturday morning follow-up sessions in September.
(For people who can't be present either Tuesday evening or Saturday morning, completing the study privately is an alternative.)
4. Complete a second online survey and one short final questionnaire.

The final questionnaire will ask about your level of involvement in this project – essentially, did you attend Sunday services or listen online, did you participate in the follow-up studies with others or did you complete them privately. And the online survey will ask the same sorts of questions regarding your opinion of spiritual things.

Questions? Call 785.484.1010



PASTOR KENT - SOUNDS GREAT!
I qualify and will happily commit to be one of the 30!

Name: _____

Email address _____

Best Contact #: _____

“9-5 ‘Til Kingdom Come” Campaign Graphic



“Bezalel and Oholiab” T-shirt Graphic



APPENDIX D: 9-5 ‘TIL KINGDOM COME SERMON MANUSCRIPTS

Week 1 – The Gift of Work

The Gift of Work

Genesis 1:1-2:3

So...how do you like *your* job?

A Gallup poll released less than two weeks ago has some startling things to say about the realities of the American workplace. And some related research, though not quite so recent, reveals some equally fascinating data about workers attitudes regarding their jobs.

In a report released on August 29th of this year, Gallup says that “Adults employed full time in the U.S. report working an average of 47 hours per week.”¹ Think of that—the *average* “full time” American worker is really working six 8-hour days a week, not five. Nearly four in 10 (40%!) say they typically work at least 50 hours...and 18% say they typically work over 60 hours a week.

I’d say the 40-hour work week isn’t all it’s cracked up to be, huh?

A survey done about a year ago by Harris Interactive reported that “55 percent of American workers would like to change careers. [More specifically], nearly 80 percent of working adults in their 20s and nearly two-thirds of those in their 30s would like to do so.”² Now—that survey was done for the University of Phoenix, so there might be a little “institutional bias” built into the survey there...but a larger survey—150,000 participants—released by Gallup a year ago says something similar. Gallup reported that “70 percent of American workers are either disengaged or actively disengaged in their jobs.”³ Specifically, about 50% don’t really care about their jobs—they’re just putting in their time...and about

¹ Lydia Saad, “The ‘40-Hour’ Workweek Is Actually Longer -- by Seven Hours, August 29, 2014, accessed September 2, 2014, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/175286/hour-workweek-actually-longer-seven-hours.aspx>.

² Jena McGregor, “Don’t like Your Job (or Career)? You’re Not Alone.,” *The Washington Post*, July 3, 2013, accessed September 2, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/on-leadership/wp/2013/07/03/dont-like-your-job-or-career-youre-not-alone/>.

³ Saad.

20% resent their jobs enough that they look for ways to “muck up” the works! (Put another way...)

On average, only about 30% of us really like going to work.

Wow! For something that eats up roughly a **third** of your life—think of it: sleep takes a third, work takes a third, and your pastor would like a good chunk of the other third, please—it has to be a tough thing to **dislike** your work that much.

And in case you’re wondering—this isn’t an east coast or west coast thing: Kansas lines right up with the national averages on this one.

So...is that the deal? That once I finish school and enter the work force, the odds are I’m really not going to like what I do with a third of the rest of my life—and I might even hate it? That “life’s hard, and then you die, and then they throw dirt in your face”...but before all that, I get to plug away, 9 to 5 for 40 or 50 years...(and for some of us, it won’t be that convenient—there’ll be 2nd shift, 3rd shift, and swing shift work!)

No wonder everybody know how this phrase ends: “Thank God it’s ... *Friday!*” No wonder Loverboy made a hit when they sang “Everybody’s Working for the Weekend”!

Work’s a bear, isn’t it?

Over the next four Sundays, we’re going to be looking at the subject of work—at what the Bible has to say about work—about God’s intention for the place of work in our lives. And I’ll just tell you up front: For all the frustration that work can be...for all the challenges of having too much work, too little work, or (at times when we wish we had it) no work at all ... for all the difficulties of satisfying the impossible boss or getting along with the unbearable co-worker or motivating the unproductive employee ... I’m convinced that God intends for our work to be a purposeful and pleasing part of our lives. That—in spite of its challenges—work can become something we look forward to and understand differently when we consider what God has to say about work. That over the next four weeks, God the Holy Spirit would like to transform our hearts so that the thought of...

*9 to 5
‘til Kingdom Come*

...transitions from sounding like something ominous and foreboding—like a threat—to sounding, rather, like something rich with hope and promise (as I believe it is). So let’s dive in together ... and there’s no better place to start than at the beginning —Genesis, chapter 1. I’m guessing you’re familiar with these opening words...

*[1] In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
(Genesis 1:1 NIV)*

That's the opening statement—the opening declaration...the summary statement ...a “chapter heading,” as it were—for all that follows. And as the story of God's creation of the heavens and the earth unfolds, the Scriptures establish clearly the pattern for how it happens:

*God speaks...
and life results.*

This happens again and again, verse by verse, something like the growing refrain of a great concerto's musical theme (I like to think). (Have you ever heard Beethoven's Fifth? Or Ravel's Bolero?) At God's voice, light fills the darkness, vegetation fills the land, fish fill the oceans, creatures fill the forests, and birds fill the air. There's a repeated motif, but each time it grows in intensity and complexity and beauty.

In Genesis 1:26, however, God the Divine Composer introduces a new motif and a new instrument through which to sound it:

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’”
(Genesis 1:26 NIV)

The new motif is dominion—“let them rule”...and the new instrument is humanity—this creature formed in the image of God! (The Scriptures don't make that statement about any other part of created order. No other part of creation is formed “in the image of God.”) And I invite you not to miss the turn the creation story takes in verse 26. Because here, Scripture reveals humanity as...

Humanity is:

Like everything else, in that we are created.

But like nothing else, in that we're...

*...formed of the dust of the earth
...animated by the breath of God
...created in the image of God*

Now, over the centuries, a lot of people have spent a lot of time pondering and discussing and debating what that means ...what it means to be formed in the image of God ...but the bottom line is, there are things about God that find points of correspondence in us. There's “stuff” about us that reflects “stuff” about Him!

And here's something I'd like you to see as we think about this: We spend a lot of time talking about what God is like. And we say things like, “God is love. God is righteous. God is sovereign. God is compassionate.” And all those things are true. But there's

something else revealed in Genesis 1 about who God is and what God is like that I seldom hear anyone mention—and it's this: God is a worker.

God Works

That God works is made clear in these opening verses of Scripture—and I'd offer, even, that this quality shows up so early and so often in the Scripture's revelation of who God is...God forming and shaping and bringing order and life...because "working" is central to who God is. Here's a thought—Jesus said so:

"My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working"
(John 5:17)

That God is a Worker is clear from all the *activity* of Genesis 1. It's clear from the declaration of Jesus Himself in John, chapter 5. But if that's not enough to convince you of its significance, please notice that when we get to a sort of "summary statement" about the creation account in Genesis 2—the Scriptures describe *God as working*...three times in two verses!

"By the seventh day, God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done"
(Genesis 2:2-3)

Here's something interesting: The Hebrew word translated "work" here is used only four times in the entire Old Testament to describe the work of God--*three* of those times are right here. But the word is used 151 other times in the Old Testament—every time describing the ordinary work of ordinary people. Because of that, I'm suggesting that—inspired by the Holy Spirit—the author of Genesis wanted to make sure *we* made the connection between God's work and ours. You see, from the beginning...

God Works

And from the beginning...

*God Works
and
So Do We*

If you're familiar at all with what Genesis says, you know that in chapter 3, there's the whole story of Adam and Eve and the serpent and the "forbidden fruit" (we usually say "apple", but the Bible's not specific). And you likely recall that—as a result of Adam and Eve's foolish dismissal of God's command and their choice to partake of the forbidden fruit regardless—God pronounces a curse...upon Eve, upon Adam, and upon the serpent. And the curse upon Adam relates directly to his work—

[17] *“Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat food from it
all the days of your life.*

[18] *It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.*

[19] *By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground...*

(Genesis 3:17-19 NIV)

Bummer, right? I mean—huge bummer! And the trouble is that many of us—if we’ve considered what the Bible has to say about work at all—have taken our cues from *this* passage...have identified all too easily with what *this* passage says about work...and, in the process, neglected other—I say) more significant passages!

You see, humanity’s history with work goes back further than the curse! It’s clear that, because of God’s fully righteous declaration in response to Adam’s sin, work takes on a more difficult and burdensome quality. “Work,” says Edward Veith, “is a virtue tainted by sin.” But we’ve got to be careful when we think about work—and the challenges it presents—not to throw the baby out with the bathwater!

Work began as God’s gift! Nothing’s changed that!

When God forms Adam from the dust of the earth...

(And by the way, the word used for God’s forming of Adam is another word for human work—it’s the word that describes the activity of a craftsman...an artisan...and most frequently the activity of a potter forming the clay...)

When God forms Adam from the dust of the earth and breathes into him the “breath of life,” He then places Adam in the Garden of Eden—another part of the story we all know. But He doesn’t place Adam in the Garden with, you know, one of those portable lounge chairs and a glass of iced tea. No—He puts Adam in a garden and gives the man a plow and a harrow:

*The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden
to work it and take care of it.
(Genesis 2:15 NIV)*

So—know this—work didn’t come about as a result of our sin. The curse that God pronounces doesn’t say that Adam has, now, to work—Adam was already working. It simply declares that the difficulties of work would increase.

Friend, the curse declared that the difficulties in childbirth would increase, too—and we still thing (in spite of the labor) that that’s a beautiful thing, too!

So...even in the Garden of Eden—even in a perfect world—life was not, for Adam, workless—some sort of all-inclusive vacation resort, where he was waited on hand and foot. Eden was a workplace, where Adam engaged and cultivated creation!

*Work is included in God's gift of a perfect world
Because we're made in the image of a God who works
our world would be incomplete—less perfect—without it.*

Let's talk for a minute, then, about the purpose of work.

Adam, Scripture says, is called to “work” the Garden and “take care of it.” You may hear this sometimes described as “the cultural mandate”—humanity’s responsibility to “make something” of the world we’ve been given. Interestingly, the words used here are the same words used consistently throughout the Old Testament to describe the ministry offered to God by Israel’s priests. Adam’s labor in the Garden is no different than the ministry of the priests—it is an act of spiritual service to the Lord...and the Garden (where Adam works!) is the sanctuary in which that ministry takes place!

And here’s where we really begin to see the purpose behind work as God’s gift...and also ways, then, that we can offer our work back *to* God. Based on what we know from Adam, we can say three things our work accomplishes:

Our work continues God's work

God—in the creation account of Genesis, chapter 1—takes what is “formless and empty” (“without form, and void” KJV) and brings it to life. He shapes it. He defines it. He establishes boundaries between the various components...and, by establishing those boundaries, establishes relationship between the elements of this created order—He creates the dry land and separates the water from it, for example. Puts the birds in the trees and the fish in the seas. He’s putting things where they go.

(Mothers of toddlers—listen up—your work has a divine precedent! Bringing order where there was once chaos!)

And as part of God’s creative actions, then, He plants a garden, full of all kinds of trees, the Bible says...

*The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—
trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.
(Genesis 2:9 NIV)*

...trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. And then He plants Adam in that garden...giving Adam responsibility to...

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

(Genesis 2:15 NIV)

...work the Garden and take care of it. The command is to care for what God has created...while cultivating it into something even more. (It occurs to me that if you're familiar with the Parable of the Talents in the New Testament—the story Jesus tells of the master who gave one servant five talents, and another two talents, and a third, one talent—and expected them to cultivate what he supplied into something more...well, that's the idea here!) Adam has a preserving and cultivating responsibility.

In chapter 1, the command is worded a bit differently...

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 1:28 NIV)

...”be fruitful...increase...fill the earth...and subdue it”...but the challenge—the charge—is the same: “Continue my work. Move what I’ve started toward its logical and beautiful conclusion! Don’t just populate the earth (you understand that—right? The command is bigger than that. If God had simply wanted 7 billion breathing bodies on the earth, He could have done that)...don’t just populate the earth...create a civilization—a culture—a world of ‘delight’ (which is what the word ‘Eden’ means) where rich and significant fellowship with me and with other people and with the rest of created order is the norm!”

God’s intention, then, is that Adam’s work continue His. And I’m arguing that God’s intention hasn’t changed—that His intention is that *our* work now “continue to continue” His. That our work continue to shape this world into all God envisioned for it when He, himself, began the process of shaping it in Genesis, chapter 1. And that’s a statement made not just about the things we consider “spiritual” things—but the predictable and ordinary things we deal with every day. Yes, even on the job. Your job is your garden to cultivate to God’s glory!

And this is where I say...if your thought, right now, is “well, my work never feels like I’m cultivating Eden!”—well, hang in there with me. Sometimes it’s our work that needs transformed—always we’re battling the ongoing impact of sin and its curse—but sometimes, it’s just the way we see our work that needs transformed—sometimes we need to grow our capacity to see what we’re doing in the “ordinary” of our world as one of God’s tool for continuing to create His extraordinary world. And there...

Our work continues God’s work

Second...

Our work partners with God’s work

You see...part of what it means for humanity to be formed “in the image of God” is that we were designed to serve as God’s representative on God’s behalf in God’s world. That, when God says within Himself...

“Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule...”
(Genesis 1:26 NIV)

...and when God says to humanity...

“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 1:28 NIV)

...that is a commissioning ceremony. We are commissioned to co-regency...to partnership...with the God who rules over all. Specifically, we are appointed to rule over the earth as He would rule over the earth. But the only way we’re ever going to do that is in partnership with Him.

When God places Adam in the Garden with instructions to “work it and take care of it”...

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.
(Genesis 2:15 NIV)

...God doesn’t, then, just wander off to other places and abandon Adam, leaving Adam to figure out what that’s all supposed to look like on his own. Rather, it’s clear (specifically from the breaking of fellowship that occurred with Adam’s sin) that, prior to Adam’s sin, *continuing* fellowship had been the norm ...that God and Adam were operating in partnership on this thing...working...together.

Indeed, even within the Godhead...God Himself—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—always exists and acts in partnership. And the gift of “work” that God has extended to us is not a gift from a deist God who—like some cosmic clockmaker—sets the world in order...gets it to ticking...and then goes off and busies Himself with other things. Rather, the God of the Christian Scriptures is an engaged God—fully and continually involved with His creation. We read it a moment ago—Jesus said about the Father (and then about Himself):

“My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working”
(John 5:17)

And guess what? The invitation to partnership with God in the work He is doing remains. “Join us,” Jesus says...

“As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me”

(John 9:4)

Indeed, God already has your garden plot ready:

*For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works,
which God prepared in advance for us to do.
(Ephesians 2:10 NIV)*

The thing's plowed and planted, so to speak—and all God needs is a partner willing to bring it to fruition! And I know what you think when I say that...

(Okay—at least, I *think* I know what you *think* when I say that. You think...)

“Okay, Pastor. After I've put in the 47 hours my 40-hour work week demands, and—well, after that, the kids have sports, and Aunt Mamie's coming in—but...after those things...I can get around to those “good works” God's prepared in advance...”

No—maybe the God who gave you the gift of work...who formed you in His image—He, himself, being a worker—and who cultivated the garden in advance for you as He mapped out the days of your life...maybe He wasn't ignoring the fact that you had a job that consumes, on its own, a third of your adult lifetime. Maybe even a third of the “good works” He's prepared in advance for you to do are tasks you can partner with Him on...in the daily grind of the 9 to 5...maybe He's already got that figured out!

Maybe there's some way in which your work was God's work before it ever became your work. Maybe God's already got that figured out. Because when I read Genesis...

Our work partners with God's work

It's what I see in the life of Adam. It's what I see in the example of Jesus. It's what I read as the promise of Scripture. Maybe my work means more than I've thought. I'm declaring that it does, because...

*Our work continues God's work
Our work partners with God's work*

And...

Our work remains blessed with His authority and purpose

Here's something I hope you can appreciate. It's not just our souls that Jesus redeems. Jesus didn't humble himself from eternal glory to the taking on of human flesh...live a sinless life in the face of Satan's most compelling temptations...die an unspeakably horrific death on a rugged cross...just so that our sins could be forgiven...our souls redeemed...and the rest of all we are and all we know left to rot as somehow unimportant or unredeemable. If there's anything I hope we can see with “new eyes” over

the next few weeks, it's that *all of created order* looks for, longs for, and is promised liberation through Christ.

*... the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed...
(Romans 8:19 NIV)*

Why? Because the creation exists alive with hope of liberation...

*...in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay
and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.
(Romans 8:21 NIV)*

...from its bondage to decay and in equal hope of its experience of the same freedom and glory the children of God already know. The creation itself groans, Romans says, in anticipation of this liberation. And here's the deal—

If it's the whole of created order that Christ died to redeem—and I get it...that might be a concept some of you've not thought much about...but—as you've heard me say, perhaps—it's not just a bunch of disembodied souls occupying some ethereal heaven “up there, somewhere” that is the hope of the Christian. In spite of the popular mythology, it's not a harp and a cloud and angel wings we're looking for. It is, rather, the consummation of all things in Christ—the completion, in full, of what God had in mind when He first spoke the worlds into existence. It is the full enjoyment of a new heaven (yes) but also a new earth—functioning as it ought to—as the home of righteousness—each of us participating in a resurrected body just as glorious as Christ's resurrected body—that is our hope!

And if it's all of that Christ died to redeem...if it's the whole of created order for which He gave His life...if Jesus' redemption is just that big...why wouldn't His redemptive act stretch to include your job, as well?

If He's restoring all things, then why would He not restore to your work—in the garden He's prepared for you—the same authority and purpose that marked Adam's work in the garden God prepared for him? But if that's so, what does your job look like when you see it like that?

I'm asking you to consider...

Our work continues His

What does your work look like when it continues the kind of creative, cultivating ordering of this world that He did in Genesis 1?

Our work partners with His

What does your work look like when you're not at your task alone...or even by your own design...but rather, in partnership with Him?

Our work remains blessed with His authority and purpose

What does your work look like when you dare to believe it to be ordained of God and blessed with His authority and purpose?

Week 2 – The Gift of Rest

The Gift of Rest

Genesis 1:1-2:3

We spent time last Sunday discussing what the early chapters of Genesis reveal about God—and about us—in relation to work. We discovered that work is central to the character of God—it’s part of who He is as revealed in what He does—and, therefore (we discovered), that part of what it means for *us* to be formed in the image of God is that we were made as workers, also! That...

Contrary to a very common sentiment, work is not a curse to be avoided, but a gift to be embraced—that there was work for humanity from the beginning as part of God’s gift to us of a perfect world. And it was significant work...purposeful work... work that continued God’s creative activity and reflected our position as partners with God in ruling the earth! That...

In the Garden of Eden, our job was to “fill the earth and subdue it”...

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 1:28 NIV)

—not just to populate it...not just “load” it with bodies...but to fill it with life...civilization...culture—to continue to develop it even beyond the beautiful place it was when we received it...to partner with God in marching civilization toward its consummation in Christ!

And the truth is—though humanity’s sin altered the challenges of work, it did not change the fundamental character of work as both “good” and “purposeful.” God’s intention for our work is that, in it, we share His regency...and that through it, we *cultivate* and *create* and bring *order and beauty* ...just as He did in developing this earth from something “formless and empty” (Gen 1:2 NIV) to something full of life and vitality. He shaped it and filled it (it might be more accurate to say He “began the task of shaping and filling it”) and then created us (as part of that process) and generously empowered us to continue the task He’d already begun of “shaping and filling” this world with His goodness.

But God’s gift of work—as good as it is...as “burdened with glorious purpose” as it is—...God’s gift of work isn’t (alone) the whole story. Our *work*—even done in partnership with God and in ways that continue His creative activity—...our *work* is not complete in and of itself. Rather, Scripture makes it clear that our...

Work must be informed by rest

The same two verses of Genesis that sort of “wrap up” the creation account of Genesis 1—Genesis 2:2-3—...the same verses that describe God as “worker” three times in two verses (I kind of imagine the author of Genesis saying, “What part of God as Worker don’t you understand?)...those same verses tell us something else about who God is and about the pattern God establishes for us. Genesis 2:2-3 says that...

*[2] By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. [3] Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.
(Genesis 2:2-3 NIV)*

Surprise! The same verses that announce so boldly “God as Worker” announce just as boldly “God as Sabbath Observer”...announce that the God who works is also the God who rests! And who—in doing so Himself—calls us to rest, as well!

These two verses are really quite amazing—partly because even when God does *nothing*, as it were...even when He rests from all his work...He’s still creating. Something new is brought into being that didn’t exist before. “In the first six days,” Bruce Waltke says...

*“In the first six days space is subdued; on the seventh, time is sanctified.”
Bruce Waltke*

Do you see that? Do you see that, by “resting from all the work of creating he had done” God “makes something different” of that seventh day—that He gives it an altogether different character...that He infused that seventh day with a distinctive significance—with a purpose all its own...somehow unique from the rest of the week?

I think understanding the significance and purpose of that *seventh* day is as essential as understanding all rest—that understanding “Sabbath” is essential to understanding what it means to be a worker formed in the image of God. And I’ll confess that I’m a little concerned—as I try to speak with you about the significance and purpose of the Sabbath—that what you think you know about the Sabbath...or what you’ve heard other preachers say about the Sabbath (because I’m the guy who’s finally getting it right!)...or perhaps legitimate questions you carry about the Sabbath... are going to get in the way of what I’d really like for you to hear most of all, this morning.

Maybe, you know, it’s a real frustration to you how you see people “disregard” the Sabbath and you think it ought to be observed more strictly...or maybe you’ve never understood why the Jewish Sabbath is Saturday (basically) and the Christian Sabbath is

Sunday (generally)...or, you know, maybe there's something else. Let me ask you this: Whatever your questions or concerns might be—would you be bold enough to just lay those aside for a few minutes and hear my best understanding of the heart of God on this matter of the Sabbath?

I'm convinced if we can hear God's heart on this matter, it'll help us with some of the more "technical" and "application-related" questions we carry—like "How do I actually 'observe the Sabbath' in 21st century America?" When we know God's heart on the matter, we get better answers to our questions. More than that, I am convinced 'observing the Sabbath'—if we can understand it and embrace it—is a "work related" principle that will transform our lives. The Sabbath, I'm convinced, serves...

Four Critical Functions

...and if we can sort of "zoom out" far enough to get our heads (and hearts) around these four critical functions of the Sabbath...not only will we get better answers to some of the more specific questions we have, but—more importantly—we'll live "better lives" on every level...because we will be living in alignment with God's intentions for us—intentions He held even as He formed us from the dust of the earth. We'll live fuller, more satisfying, more God-honoring and influential lives because we'll be operating within our manufacturer's specifications (so to speak)!

I jammed up a paper shredder the other day. It was a light-duty unit, made for 3 sheets of paper at a time...not even designed to handle staples or paper clips or anything like that...and I tried to run a plastic credit card through it. I knew what I was doing...and did it anyway (ever done that?)...and jammed it up and nearly burned out the motor in the process. I was trying to do something it wasn't designed to do!

And when I turned it upside down to take it apart for repair—'cause there ain't nothin' I won't at least *try* to repair, right?—I saw that my paper shredder had a specified "duty cycle."

Do you know what that is? It's a limit on the amount of time you're supposed to actually *use* the machine relative to how long you have it on. I think it was, like, 2 minutes of "non-use" for every 4 minutes of "use"—but I don't remember, because I have no intentions of following those guidelines...I'm going to use that machine until I break it! But how many of you understand that the guidelines are there for a reason...and as I persist in ignoring them, I'm gonna burn up the machine and then it won't be good for anything except taking up space in the paper shredder cemetery!

Well, in Genesis 2 (and in any number of other places in the Scriptures) there's a pattern of "Sabbath" that God establishes..."manufacturer's guidelines"... and following those guidelines—embracing the practice of Sabbath—fulfills four critical functions. I'd like to identify those for you and discuss them with you just a bit.

So we've all got these two key verses in our heads, right?

*[2] By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. [3] Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.
(Genesis 2:2-3 NIV)*

Why does embracing that pattern matter? Why would God establish the Sabbath?
First...

Sabbath is Testimony

When I practice Sabbath, I testify that I am under God's authority, in partnership with God's leadership, and dependent upon Him for who I am and all I enjoy.

Now listen—I'm gonna read that little 3-point list again...and I'd like you to ask yourself if you want that to be true of you.

When I practice Sabbath, I testify that I am...

*...under God's authority
...in partnership with God's leadership
...dependent upon Him for who I am and all I enjoy*

Let's assume (for the moment) that God and I become business partners. To be clear, I'm a minority owner—God's the majority owner, and so God's the One who gets to call the shots. I've pledged to operate under His authority...and in partnership with His leadership...and to remain dependent upon Him for who I am and all I enjoy. (That's really a pretty good description for what it means to live this life of faith, isn't it?)

God moves us to the great Northwest where we open up a logging business—

*G & K Lumberjacks
Sawing Logs 'til Kingdom Come*

Like so many business start-ups, we're underfunded...so we start with nothing more than a two-man crosscut saw. (*Abbey—Use pic on flash drive if possible*) But the trees are plentiful...we've launched on a beautiful Monday morning...so we get to work. We work Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday...the getting's good...the sales are moving along...the money's coming in...we're feeling good—so we keep working.

We work Thursday, then Friday, then Saturday...and we are about to break even! If we'll just keep going, we'll not only make it—we might even get ahead of the game a bit...we can move this business along! I'm pretty excited...and I want to see this thing succeed! But at quittin' time on Saturday, God says, "Good week's work—we'll take tomorrow off...and start again on Monday."

Here's my question:

What does it say if I decide to work the next day, anyway?

If I know my best work is only done in partnership with Him...and I know my true identity and blessing are found in Him (I am who I am because of Him)...and I've declared He gets to be king...what does it say if He says "six days on—full bore, if you want—and one day off" and I decide to work that seventh day, anyway?

I find this the idea of me—out in the forest alone, trying to operate a two-man saw—the perfect mental image of what many of us have done with the Sabbath. Clearly—as long as I'm out there clearing the forest when He's said "This day is mine," I'm **not** operating under His authority...I'm not in partnership with His leadership... and I'm not depending on Him for who I am and all I enjoy.

Instead, I'm declaring the opposite—that I'm my own boss and **I'll** be deciding what to do with my time—...that I'm not working in partnership with Him—'cause I'm clearly working whether He's working or not...and that I apparently have decided I have to make it on my own—because I'm clearly not depending on Him for who I am and all I enjoy...I'm depending on what I can get done with one more day's work!

And that's exactly what we do when there's no practice of the Sabbath in our lives—when there's no time strictly devoted to Him! We do it with our work—when we think we've **got** to work every day regardless just to stay afloat—we make work our source, instead of trusting God's provision, and end up giving "work" the place that only *God* should hold. But many do it not only with work...but with leisure, as well—when nothing about our non-working hours says, "Even **this** time is sacred—even **these** moments are to be lived under His authority, and in partnership with Him as the source of who I am and all I enjoy! (And here's the trouble with that...)

The practice of Sabbath is rooted in creation itself...and comes with the understanding that the purpose of work—that the purpose of life—is not just to stay ahead of the bill collector...but that the purpose and joy of work is so much bigger than that: Partnering with God toward the world He envisioned when He first began to speak it into existence! That reality begs the question of whether working 24/7/365 reflects the kind of world our God is working for...and, equally, begs the question of whether every spare moment outside of the workplace being spent in a frantic rush from one activity to another really reflects the kind of world our God is building!

By contrast—when I learn to embrace and practice Sabbath—I testify that my life is tied to something bigger than the 9 to 5...bigger than the accumulation of "more"...bigger than the non-stop agenda this world (our culture) would like to impose upon us.

Sabbath is Testimony

Second...

Sabbath is Celebration

In Deuteronomy, chapter 5—one of the places in Scripture where the Ten Commandments are found—Moses says to the Israelites...

*[12] Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you.
[13] Six days you shall labor and do all your work, [14] but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work...
(Deuteronomy 5:12-14 NIV)*

And the next verse—verse 15—gives the reason for observing the Sabbath...

*[15] Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.
(Deuteronomy 5:15 NIV)*

That command—as it stands—is (of course) uniquely applicable to the Israelites, as none of us were physically enslaved in Egypt...nor were we physically brought out of Egypt with “a mighty hand and an outstretched arm” as Israel was. But the principle behind the command is absolutely transferable and applicable to those who count themselves among the people of God. The reason Moses gives for observing *Sabbath* adds a new layer of meaning to the practice of Sabbath...and gives us one more reason to make sure we observe the Sabbath—as a celebration before the Lord our God!

You see, if Israel’s history is anything, it is a prequel to our history! If Israel’s deliverance from slavery is anything, it is a prequel to our deliverance from sin! What God did for the Israelites through Moses...He most certainly did in greater measure for us through Christ. And so—when Moses speaks to the Israelites and says, “Stop working! Stop your work a day a week—cease from your labors as our God did at creation—and dedicate that day in celebration to the saving act of God when He brought you out of Egypt”—well, there’s no doubt that such a celebration ought to be duplicated in the life of every New Testament believer—and **that** at least as often!

Honestly—we’re so remarkably foolish in this regard! Think about it. Do you suppose after 400 years in slavery...I mean—I don’t care how long it’s been since you’ve had a little vacation or even a day off...nobody here’s been going at it for 400 years! But please note: the Hebrews were not merely “household servants” in 1950s America, where “Christian or not,” Sunday was considered a day of rest...most everybody got a day off. No—the Hebrews were slaves in pagan Egypt. I assure you—they never heard their bosses say the words “day off”...and never dreamed of a day for Sabbath *every week*.

So do you suppose that, after 400 years in slavery, God had to say it more than once to anyone? “Take the day off! Celebrate your freedom!”

Do you understand—one of the things that says to a liberated slave is, “You are more than just a piece of property—more than just a machine for production. You are a human being formed in the image of a loving God who has delivered you from bondage, supplying your greatest need—and so a God who can be trusted to supply your every need!”

“Your richest identity is not found in what you accomplish, but in who it is you belong to! You are mine—my treasured possession!”

Indeed, that’s exactly what Moses says to Israel, just a few chapters later—

*The LORD has declared this day that you are his people,
his treasured possession as he promised
(Deuteronomy 26:18 NIV)*

We testify to that when we embrace the practice of Sabbath...and embracing the practice of Sabbath gives us opportunity to celebrate that, as well.

That’s why so frequently worship is associated with Sabbath. They’re not the same thing—and by all means, worship should be a constant of every day. But a Sabbath day allows a freedom for worship...an opportunity for worship...that simply isn’t always possible on a day filled with labor.

Sabbath is Testimony

Sabbath is Celebration

Third...

Sabbath is Identity

Certainly that was true for Israel. For Israel, Sabbath observance served—and still does serve—as continuing evidence of (what? Not rules and restrictions that bind her from “doing anything” on the Sabbath, but rather, of) her unique standing in the world as “chosen by God for covenant with Him.” God says as much—Exodus 31:13:

*This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come...
(Exodus 31:13 NIV)*

If it is nothing else (and I think we’ve already shown, it’s much, much more, but) ...if it is nothing else, the Sabbath serves as an identifier...an authenticator—this one belongs to the Lord!

There’s a synagogue near the house where my wife grew up. Every Saturday, without fail, you will see scores of faithful Jews walking down the street, dressed for worship. The *first* time you see the *first* person, you may be confused—“What’s that about? Who’s that? Where are they going dressed like that?” But if it takes you any longer

than about 60 seconds to catch a clue...well, we've got to expand your understanding of cross-cultural experiences! Because when there are dozens of people, who every Saturday, dressed for worship, filling the sidewalks of what is, really, a main automotive artery...it doesn't take long to figure out who they are!

Their commitment to Sabbath observance serves identity—and by that I mean not just helping us to identify them—but helping them to identify themselves! Sabbath observance becomes a tool that helps shape their identity! “This is who we are...this is what we do!”

Now, there are a boatload of identities to be embraced in our world. You can identify yourself politically—“I'm a moderate.” “I'm a liberal.” “I'm a libertarian!” You can identify yourself socially—“I'm a hipster.” “I'm goth.” “I'm a member of the Purple Hat Society!” You can identify yourself by your leisure pursuits—“I'm a fisherman.” “I'm a sports fan.” “I like the races!”

And the fact is, if you chose to, you could identify yourself as a person who chooses to observe the Sabbath that God himself ordained. You could identify yourself as one who observes, embraces, and practices the Sabbath.

“How could I do that, pastor?” By decided what it is about the Biblical Sabbath that's non-negotiable to you.

We all have things that are non-negotiable. For some of you, being pro-life politically is non-negotiable. You could agree with every other position a candidate takes, and if they're not pro-life, they're not getting your vote.

For some of you, being debt-free is non-negotiable. If you had the chance to buy a million-dollar house for \$10,000 but had to borrow the money to do it, you'd turn it down because you've determined never to be in debt again.

What's non-negotiable for you with regard to the Sabbath? Here's the deal: If Sabbath observance—whatever that looks like—is something actually built into created order itself by what God does when He rests on the seventh day...if God really does establish, by resting, a pattern for humanity (formed in His image) to follow—what would it be that identifies you as one who practices what God has ordained?

When you decide what that is, it will serve not only to identify you as “Sabbath observant” to others...but will shape your own identity in a way that helps you say, “This is what I do...because *this* is who I am.” “I'm not letting the world shape me into its mold...I'm shaping my world to reflect God's mold...God's pattern.”

Sabbath is Testimony

Sabbath is Celebration

Sabbath is Identity

Fourth...

Sabbath is Promise

This practice of “Sabbath” is really a prophetic practice. We “cease” our activity—at least once a week, if I read the Scriptures right—we *stop* with our manipulation of our world...our striving...our clamoring—to rest in what Christ has done for us. To acknowledge that He’s God and we’re not. To strengthen, renew, and celebrate our grace-founded relationship with Him. And we do all that in prophetic anticipation of (we take a prophetic action that anticipates) what He has promised for all eternity...a Sabbath rest for the people of God!

There remains, then, a Sabbath rest. Make every effort to enter into that rest.

We are promised a day—an eternal day—when the sin-induced toil that marks our work in this present age will be eliminated...and the heavens and earth will be united in righteousness...under our altogether righteous King, Jesus the Christ. If you had to list a dozen words or so that would describe that age, this would have to be one of them: Rest. Sabbath rest.

And so—like so many other things we do—we choose...we determine...to observe Sabbath here and now...we let that choice mark us as unique, and as uniquely His...because we are choosing to live the future, now...to taste the realities of the coming age in this present age.

Do you think, in “Kingdom Come” you’ll be running around like a chicken with its head cut off...just fighting to get your “to do” list completed...just hoping to stay afloat...just wishing you could sit down for a minute and rest?

Why don’t you show the Devil you can? Why don’t you just trust God enough to do so? To open and use His gift of Sabbath?

What I am talking about involves more than “whether or not” you show up for church on Sunday. There are a million good reasons to be obsessively faithful to church even if God had never ordained a “Sabbath.” I am asking you to make Sabbath as big as God has made it—and ask yourself... “What is it about my life that reflects this ‘Sabbath rest rhythm’ that God Himself has built in to the order of creation? What part of my life is Sabbath?”

Some of us couldn’t identify Sabbath in our lives. But to make work (which is actually the focus of our conversation this month) all it should be...and to make life itself all it should be—ordained and blessed by God and useful for His purposes—we’re going to have to learn to make Sabbath all it should be...testifying by it...celebrating through it...finding identity in it...renewing in our hearts God’s promise through the practice of it! To properly appreciate the gift of work...we must also embrace the gift of Sabbath.

Week 3 – The Gift of Ability

The Gift of Ability

Exodus 31:1-11

I know. I say this all the time. But this morning’s text tells one of my favorite “Bible stories.”

There are certain stories that are just favorites, you know? Who doesn’t love the story of David and Goliath? I love the often-overlooked detail that, before David showed up at the battlefield, for 40 days the armies of the Israelites and the Philistines had faced off shouting their war cries at each other every morning. Then they apparently just dropped their weapons to their sides and walked back to camp!

(Can you imagine the Chiefs and their opponent traveling to the stadium, taping up, suiting up, going through their pre-game routine, taking the field with fireworks and fog machines, crowd roaring, high fives and chest bumps all around ... and then just pulling their helmets off, heading back to the locker rooms, and calling it a day???)

Who doesn’t love the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel? (We talked about it a few weeks ago.) All the prophets of the false God Baal crying out to their god with no response...and Elijah just egging ‘em on—“Cry a little louder—maybe your god’s on vacation...or taking a nap...or using the men’s room!”

Who doesn’t love the compassion Jesus shows the woman caught in adultery... or the healing He brings to Jairus’ daughter...or the moment when He tells his professional-fisherman disciples how to fish—“Cast your nets on the other side, boys!”—and He turns out to be right!

We’ve all got our favorites, I’m betting... (I’m hoping, at least!) ...but there’s a Bible story that’s been added to the “favorites” list for me as I’ve been examining what the Bible has to say about work. It’s a story found in Exodus, chapter 31...and it has to do with the construction of Israel’s tabernacle following their covenant with God at Mt. Sinai.

God has delivered the Hebrew people—the descendants of Abraham—from slavery in Egypt. He’s brought them to Mt. Sinai under Moses’ leadership, where He covenants with them... (so, we’ve talked about how all this is really an expression of the same kind of creative activity we see God doing in Genesis—He takes chaos and gives it form and structure...He creates a “people” where, before, there was just “property”... His actions recognize Abraham’s descendants not as machinery but as human beings...and by those actions, then, He gives them an identity...and an identity together as “the people of God” ...) and...

Rightfully, God wants to be “present” and “known” at the center of their existences. And so He instructs Moses that a tabernacle is to be built—a “place of dwelling” ... a “sanctuary” ... a sacred place where God would meet with His people ... and they with Him.

God gives Moses explicit revelation regarding the design of the tabernacle—and it is a complex, costly, elaborate, and beautiful undertaking. If you’ve ever looked at blueprints for the construction of a building ... and especially if you’ve read any of the accompanying specifications ... that’s kind of what Moses gets from God. Not only details on the construction, but specifics as to materials and surfaces and fabrics and decorations. When I read through the Scriptures that lay out the details of the tabernacle and its construction...it boggles my mind! On the right day, I *love* complexity! “Life’s in the details, my friend!” But even I get lost in the intricacy that’s involved in what we know about the construction of the tabernacle for the Israelites.

God, on the other hand, wasn’t thrown by the details...or by the challenge of getting the tabernacle built. He knew just what to do ... and just how to do it. And that’s where we’re going to pick up the story in Exodus 31. Exodus 31:1-11 says this:

[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. [6] Moreover, I have appointed Oholiab son of Ahisamak, of the tribe of Dan, to help him. Also I have given ability to all the skilled workers to make everything I have commanded you: [7] the tent of meeting, the ark of the covenant law with the atonement cover on it, and all the other furnishings of the tent—[8] the table and its articles, the pure gold lampstand and all its accessories, the altar of incense, [9] the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, the basin with its stand—[10] and also the woven garments, both the sacred garments for Aaron the priest and the garments for his sons when they serve as priests, [11] and the anointing oil and fragrant incense for the Holy Place. They are to make them just as I commanded you.”
(Exodus 31:1-11 NIV)

Pentecostal people love to talk about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost—Acts, chapter 2. Pentecostal preachers love to preach about the activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of the early church...the evidence of the God’s activity among God’s people—about salvation...and healing...and deliverance from demons—all when the church lives full of the Holy Spirit.

But Pentecostal people and preachers alike ought to be reminded that the first person ever recorded in Scripture as having been “filled with the Spirit of God” was not an apostle or even a preacher—it was a guy who worked construction. My blue-collar buddy—Bezalel, son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.”

“See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God...”

(Exodus 31:2-3)

And the evidence that, indeed, he's been filled with God's Spirit shows up *first* ... on the jobsite! Talk about redefining "the initial evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit"! When you don't limit your reading about the Holy Spirit to the book of Acts—when you include the first infilling recorded anywhere in the Bible—the *initial* initial evidence appears to be marketplace skill and ability—the blessings of God upon this *worker*! God says to Moses, "I've made this guy the guy for the job...by filling him with my Spirit!"

And that really takes us to where I want to go, this morning...while I talk with you a bit about "The Gift of Ability." We've talked about the gift of work—how we...because we've been formed in the image of the God who works...were made for work, ourselves—His work—"...good works He prepared in advance for us to do"! ...work that continues the creative, cultivating process He began in Genesis, chapter 1.

We've talked about the gift of rest—of Sabbath, really—and how it serves as (1) a means of testimony...as (2) an opportunity for celebration...as (3) a tool to for building our identity in Him...and as (4) a way to prophetically declare (and live in the now) the Sabbath experience He promises will be ours for all eternity.

Today, I want to talk about...

The Gift of Ability

—those abilities God gives us by means of the Holy Spirit. And I invite you to expand your definition of "gifts given by the Holy Spirit" beyond those listings of the "gifts of the Spirit" we read about in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12 and Ephesians 4...to consider that whatever capacities you enjoy... whatever strengths you exhibit... and whatever opportunities you may have to invest who you are fruitfully in the world around you...serve as evidence of the beauty of Holy Spirit empowerment for every facet of your life.

What we discover from the account of Bezalel and Oholiab is that...

The Gift of Ability

God chooses us purposefully
God equips us bountifully
God connects us cosmically

Let's talk about it a bit. First...

God chooses us purposefully

There's no doubt—God chose Bezalel with a purpose in mind. The whole passage opens with Bezalel's being chosen...

*“See, I have chosen Bezalel...
(Exodus 31:2 NIV)*

...and then goes on to list a dozen tasks (or more) for which Bezalel was chosen...and if you whittle those eleven verses all down to the core...what God tells Moses comes out something like this—

*“See, I have chosen Bezalel...
...and I have filled him with the Spirit of God...
...to make everything I have commanded you.
(Exodus 31:2, 3, 6 NIV)*

...in order that he might build a tabernacle to My glory...in order that he might make everything I have commanded you to make...so that I might be in the heart of this nation...at the center of my peoples' lives...rightly celebrated and rightly available!

There was purpose in Bezalel's calling!

God's always doing that, you know? The Scriptures are filled with examples of God calling people with a God-honoring, Kingdom-advancing purpose in mind. He calls Abraham...

*[1] “Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. [2] “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing...”
(Genesis 12:1-2 NIV)*

He calls Moses...

*“Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘This is what the LORD says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me.’”
(Exodus 8:1 NIV)*

He calls Gideon...

*“Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?”
(Judges 6:14 NIV)*

He calls Jonah...

*“Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it...”
(Jonah 1:1 NIV)*

He calls Peter...

*"Simon son of John, do you love me? ...Feed my sheep."
(John 21:17 NIV)*

He calls Paul—then Saul—on the Road to Emmaus...

*"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."
(Acts 9:6 NIV)*

And here's something I know about God—he's no "respector of persons."

Paul makes it clear that that's true regarding where we all stand before God in terms of our sinfulness and need of forgiveness—Romans 2:11...

*God does not show favoritism.
(Romans 2:11 NIV)*

...and Peter declares that's equally true of God's readiness to pour out grace on everybody (much to Peter's surprise)—Acts, chapter 10...

*God does not show favoritism
(Acts 10:34 NIV)*

The same is true of the purpose with which God forms us and calls us! He doesn't form some of us purposefully...and others, sort of nonchalantly or carelessly. God doesn't have a day on the job where, you know, He didn't sleep well the night before...or ate something that upset his stomach, so He's not paying attention. No—I'm convinced—what was true for Jeremiah...what God said to Jeremiah...is true for us:

*"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart..."
(Jeremiah 1:5 NIV)*

The *specifics* of your call may be different than someone else's...but the respect He affords you as one formed in His image...as one fearfully and wonderfully made...means **you** were formed with just as much intentionality...just as much thoughtfulness—that you are just as "burdened with glorious purpose"—as any human being who's ever lived!

*"See, I have chosen Bezalel..."
(Exodus 31:2 NIV)*

Neither your place and calling—nor mine—may seem as noteworthy or significant in our eyes as the place and calling Bezalel was afforded, but—you know what—we're not in charge—we don't get to make that call. ("Coach, I don't want to play right field—I want to pitch!" Well, guess what—there **are** times and places where you just trust that the coach

knows **why** He has you positioned **where** He has you positioned. And if you want to pitch instead of playing right field...at least **part** of getting the opportunity to pitch involves playing right field like there's no tomorrow!) Here's what I do know: Just as purposefully as God chose Bezalel, He's chosen every one of us. "You did not choose me," Jesus said...

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit--fruit that will last--and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you."
(John 15:16 NIV)

What can we learn from Bezalel and Oholiab? First...

God chooses us purposefully

Second...

God equips us bountifully

I preach to myself here...and you can listen in if you want. And my guess is that you ought to—that you need to—because my guess is you're just as inclined as I am to look at what you **don't** have...think about what you **lack** than you are to consider what you **do** have...and more than that—more than that—what God is willing to bountifully supply to you!

I defy you to find me a place in the Scriptures where God and all He supplied was not enough! I defy you to find me a place in the Scriptures where God was stingy!

God gives to Adam what?

*...every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth
and every tree that has fruit with seed in it."*
(Genesis 1:29 NIV)

God says to Noah...

"Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything."
(Genesis 9:3 NIV)

God tells Abram (Abraham)—

"Look around ... All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever."
(Genesis 13:14-15 NIV)

(One **might** conclude that God is not only the God who works...and the God who rests...but the God who **gives**--and **that** in abundance!)

When Jesus feeds five-thousand with five loaves and two fishes, “they all ate and were satisfied”...

*They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up
twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish.
(Mark 6:42-43 NIV)*

...and there were leftovers enough for each of the twelve disciples to require a carry-out *basket*! (“This little Styrofoam thing isn’t gonna work—you got anything bigger?”)

When you get to the end of the book—the consummation of all things in Christ—the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21 is marked by such abundance that...

*“the nations ... walk by its light and the kinds of the earth ... bring their splendor into it.”
(Revelation 21:24 NIV)*

Our God, my friend, is more than enough...and He acts in ways that are abundantly generous toward us! We’ve said this before, but...

*God acts not out of our lack
but out of His abundance!*

*“Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ”
(Ephesians 2:4-5 NIV)*

What’s the motivation there? To be sure, our need was great—beyond our capacity to meet it. But it’s not the need that motivates God’s actions—it’s His abundance!

*“From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.”
(John 1:16 NIV)*

And I’m hungry for you to understand, this morning, that God’s abundance toward you—His ability and willingness to supply every need and equip you for every good work—doesn’t stop the minute you step on the shop floor or into the office or into the classroom or into wherever it is you find yourself employed!

God equips us bountifully

And—here’s a thought—through His purposeful calling and bountiful equipping (presuming here that our lives are submitted to Him) God continues to engage this world and shape it according to the intent He had for it when He formed it!

He gifts Bezalel and Oholiab and “all the workers” (Exodus 31:6 says) with “ability” to carry out His purpose...to continue His work. Just as He gifted Adam with certain capacities to continue His work in that sanctuary we know by name as the Garden of Eden...he gifts Bezalel and Oholiab and “all the workers” with the capacities needed to see

“His kingdom come and His will done” in the construction of the Tabernacle for Israel. And I declare today that He’s done the same with you—equipped you (not minimally, but bountifully) so that *you*—on the job and off it—can be successfully about your Father’s business.

*God chooses us purposefully
God equips us bountifully*

And third...

God connects us cosmically

I love myself for using that word—“cosmically!” I know—that’s not a word we use every day...unless, perhaps, you’ve delusions of grandeur or are really into sci-fi or something. But the reality—and think about this in terms of what we just said about how the calling and equipping of God is one of the ways He continues his creative and cultivating work in the world—He gifts people with what they need to do the tasks He wants to see accomplished...the reality is that one of the greatest things God does with our work, then, is to connect us to “everyone else” and “everything else” that’s going on around us...in ways that (at the same time) tie our work to His eternal plan...in ways that help us see the connection (and sometimes just “trust” the connection) between our quite local activity and God’s cosmic activity...between what we’re doing in our small world 9 to 5 and what God is doing in His boundless world for all eternity!

Listen—we’ve talked about broadening our understanding of what Scripture means when it describes those...

*“...good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.”
(Ephesians 2:10 NIV)*

...broadening our understanding of that to include the reality that maybe those works involve our *activity*...and our *productivity*...on the job! Well, it’s only three verses prior to this verse that where the Apostle Paul declares that part of the reason God does that is...

*“...in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace,
expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus”
(Ephesians 2:7 NIV)*

Paul connects the “good works” God’s prepared for us in the here and now—yep, even “good works” that are no more “spiritual” than just giving an honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay...Paul connects even those good works with the eternal destiny every one of us carries of bringing glory to Jesus forever and ever in His coming Kingdom!

I declare that my work and your work is cosmic in scale. We act, too often, like the activity of the Holy Spirit on the earth today is limited to the salvation of the human soul...and by that we miss the greatness and engagement of God with our world. The

Scriptures reveal that the activity of the Holy Spirit has liberty to engage the whole person and the entire planet...including every laborer's task and every economic system—or, as Abraham Kuyper (who we quoted a week or two ago) has said:

“There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, ‘Mine!’”
Abraham Kuyper

I love it that the first person about whom (the Bible says) *God* himself says...

I have filled him with the Spirit of God...
(Exodus 31:3 NIV)

...I love it that *that* guy was a “construction worker.” That Bezalel and Oholiab—filled with the Spirit of God—knew their task was not just to build a portable tent...but to create a place of worship to God Almighty.

I tell you that that's our task, as well. Called purposefully, and equipped bountifully, and connected cosmically...we're privileged (yep, even in the rough and tumble of the day-to-day 9 to 5) to complete those “good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Week 4 – The Gift of Future

The Gift of Future
Colossians 3:22-24

So...let's review:

The Gift of Work

As creatures formed in the image of the God who works, work for us is (1) not a curse, but was part of God's gift of a perfect world to us...and work is (2) one way we're privileged to participate with Him in dominion over all the earth. We're invited to cultivate, create, and shape this earth according to God's purposes—just as Adam did in the Garden of Eden.

Because of sin, our work is certainly not trouble-free, but it remains fundamentally good and fundamentally purposeful, as it has been since the beginning.

The Gift of Rest

Sabbath rest is equally good and purposeful ... and practicing Sabbath serves at least four critical functions. First, it serves as *testimony* ... that we're under God's authority, working in partnership with Him, and dependent upon Him for who we are and all we enjoy.

Likewise, Sabbath gives opportunity for *celebration*—the celebration of all sorts of things, but primarily the celebration of the finished work of Christ by which our redemption is secure. We don't take a Sabbath because our work is complete—we take a Sabbath because Christ's work is complete!

Furthermore, Sabbath serves to shape our *identity*—both (1) with others (how we treat Sabbath rest tells *other* people something about our relationship with God)...and (2) within ourselves—we become different people when we choose to practice Sabbath than we would be had we not chosen to practice Sabbath.

Finally, Sabbath speaks of *promise*, as by the practice of Sabbath rest, we anticipate that ultimate place of completeness in Christ He has secured for us for all eternity.

The Gift of Ability

Our work (and our rest), then, is rooted in the past activity of creation. Everything we said about work and rest the first two Sundays grows from Genesis 1 and 2—creation! But our work is equally rooted in the *present*—in the reality of redemption ... whereby *every one* of us is privileged to know the fullness of the Spirit's work as did Bezalel and Oholiab, who we talked about last week. *We* have experienced what Bezalel and his co-workers experienced—how (through the Holy Spirit) God calls us purposefully, equips us bountifully, and connects us cosmically.

Surely that's all we'd really need to know, right? Surely that's enough! That the goodness and inherent rightness in our work is rooted in creation (past) and renewed in our redemption (present)!

And that's where you say, "Oh, no, Pastor Kent—tell us more!"

Alright—I will. There's at least one more Scriptural revelation about our work that's worth our chasing together this morning ... and I'm not sure we didn't save the best for last. I want us to talk together, this morning, about...

The Gift of Future

I'm praying, this morning, that our attitudes about our work be captured by a fresh sense of the future promised us "in Christ." It is a powerful, beautiful, redeemed and righteous future—and worth every investment we might make in it in the here and now.

But what I want to say about our future in Christ is rooted in something we've been saying over the last few years. So let me start by saying it again. In short...

When Jesus shows up on the earth, time is transformed

The nature of the age in which we live is changed.

Jesus spends his first 30 years or so on this earth in obscurity—...and BTW, everything we know about those years says Jesus spent them doing carpentry ... that the redeemer of all Creation knew the joy of working with His hands ... of building stuff ... knew the discipline of swinging a hammer and guiding a chisel...that Jesus knew what it was to smash His thumb ... to have calloused skin and a sweaty brow! But...

After 30 years or so of working as a craftsman—an artisan—in the village of Nazareth, Jesus is baptized by John in the Jordan River as something of the signaling of a transition point into a more public ministry. The Holy Spirit descends upon Him from heaven like a dove. The Father speaks from heaven—“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” And after forty days of testing in the wilderness, Jesus heads back his hometown of Nazareth, and there—in His hometown synagogue—He’s not Jesus the Carpenter, but Jesus the wannabe Rabbi. And He’s given the privilege of reading the Scripture to the congregation on the Sabbath.

Now, there was an assigned reading for the day...but Jesus chooses to ignore it. (Think of this in terms of my having asked Ed Patterson to read a particular Scripture today...and having him—without any clearance, Clarence—choose to read something else. You know how that’d go over with me and my tidy little order of service, right? That’s what happens here!) The Gospel of Luke tells us that when the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Jesus, he unrolled it to a different place than where he had been assigned to read from—he found, instead, the place where it is written...

[17] ...the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

*[18] “The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
[19] to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

It was—I’m sure—a powerful reading of the text! (I mean, you’ve got the Word reading the Word!) And here’s what you’ve got to know about that: This was a prophetic passage. It was something the worshippers at Nazareth anticipated coming to pass in the future...and perhaps even well into the future. It’s the same kind of thing we think when we read about the breaking of the seven seals in Revelation or the Battle of Armageddon. We’re sure those things are going to happen—and maybe even very soon—but we don’t think they’re happening “now.” Not just yet! But Luke says that Jesus, having read this prophetic passage from Isaiah...

[20] Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. [21] He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

(Luke 4:17-21 NIV)

Today this Scripture is fulfilled! What you've just heard is happening now! That, my friend, if true ... is a startling reality... a profound revelation that compels a re-evaluation of the nature of the age in which we live! I know, right! I don't think we spend much time considering "what age we live in" ... but the Scriptures paint the picture of a coming age of righteousness and peace and wholeness ("shalom" would be the Jewish word to use there) ... an age when everything will be as it should be ... and one thing we know is that everything isn't as it ought to be today.

So we must not be there yet, right?

But Jesus shows up and says, "Oh yes we are!" I mean—if I can paraphrase it a bit ... and interpret Jesus' words here a bit ... what Jesus says is that anywhere He's present ... and anywhere He reigns ... eternity starts now! "You've passed from death to life" 1 John says. "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing!"

The Scripture Jesus reads is about the future—there's no doubt about that. The Scripture speaks to a divine "year of jubilee," really, in which sin is pardoned and debt is forgiven and healing is accomplished and liberty is restored! But while his listeners were busy thinking that that only happens somewhere down the road, Jesus says "Nope—that future starts now!" "Today this Scripture is fulfilled ..."

And here's the thing: In the life and ministry of Jesus...and—listen closely—in the life and ministry of the church, as well (read the book of Acts), the kind of things we expect to be true of eternity ("heaven," we usually say) begin to happen in the present—in the now. Sins are forgiven. Bodies are healed. Demons are defeated. Relationships are restored. Death—ultimately—is overcome! So that the only reasonable conclusion to reach is this one:

*In the ministry of Jesus ... and in the life of the church ...
God's promised future becomes present reality!*

The age to come invades the age that is! (And) "Holy Spirit-filled," "Holy Spirit-fueled" believers live the future now!

And (just to be clear)...that future we live now—just like the future that *awaits* us—doesn't consist of (1) harps and (2) angel wings and (3) floating about eternally on fluffy clouds. The future that awaits us isn't about "just" the redemption of our souls ... but also about the resurrection of our bodies. And the promise of our future isn't limited to "heaven" ... but is the promise of...

*But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth,
where righteousness dwells.*

(2 Peter 3:13 NIV)

... a new heaven and a new earth—the promise of the whole of creation “filled with God's righteousness,” one translation says.

We've talked about this—but when you read the closing chapters of Revelation, the end of the story is not to float about eternally on a cloud ... nor is it even a *return* to the beauty of Garden of Eden ... (“People longing for a return to Eden,” says a guy named Paul Rude, “desire the wrong end of the journey”). The end of the story is not an *escape* from earth ... nor is it a *return* to the Garden of Eden ... but it is the hope—the confident assurance—of “a new heaven and a new earth”—all of it enjoying the continued development into the God-honoring civilization God Himself intended when He formed it! Revelation, chapter 21...

[1] Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. [2] I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. [3] And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. [4] ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”
(Revelation 21:1-4 NIV)

That's not primarily a vision of heaven. That's a vision of what happens on a renewed earth! Jeff Van Duzer says...

“The last chapters of Revelation reveal that God will get what God wanted from the beginning. With the arrival of the new heaven and the new earth, the curse has been reversed and God's intended “goodness” has been restored. The sea, which in the Hebrew worldview reflected a dangerous chaos apart from God, is to be gone forever. The intimacy lost in Genesis 3 will be fully restored. Once again, God will dwell with humanity and, in contrast to the whole of human experience since the Garden, men and women will once again be able to see God's face.”⁴

Or as Amy Sherman has put it more succinctly ...

“If anything, this gospel is about heaven coming to earth, not us going to heaven.”

Our opportunity—by virtue of the incarnation of Jesus Christ and then the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh—...our opportunity is to—in some way... on some level—live our promised future now. To flesh out ... and by everything we do ... make heavenly realities *earthly* realities in the power and authority of the Holy Spirit, just like Jesus did. To see His kingdom come, and His will done on earth as it is in heaven... (And in my mind, here's where it gets good...)

⁴ Jeff Van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God*: (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 84.

That's true in every area of **my** life and **yours**—including our work.

In Colossians, chapter 3—which is really my text for this morning (some of you can't believe I'm just now to my text...and some of you are relieved that, at least, I finally got here!)—...in Colossians chapter 3, I'm convinced that the Apostle Paul is quite aware of everything we just said about how the appearing of Jesus changes everything ... quite aware that we get the privilege of living the future now ... of “pulling heaven” into our earthly existence, as it were ...

Aware of the transformation of the age accomplished by Christ, the Apostle Paul challenges believers to...

... *set both heart and mind on things above (Col 3:1-2)*
 ... *put to death what belongs to the sinful nature (Col 3:5)*
 ... *“put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator”*
(Col 3:10)
 ... *to “whatever you do ... do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col 3:17)*

...to do all in the name of the resurrected, ever-living Lord! And then, in 3:18 ... Paul begins to give some very specific ways in which that is to happen. “So,” he says...

[18] *Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.*
 [19] *Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.*
 [20] *Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.*
 [21] *Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.*
(Colossians 3:18-20 NIV)

And then we get to the matter of employees:

[22] *Slaves, obey your earthly masters...*

I know ... I **know** ... that when I read that, some of you (of course) say, “I'm no slave—what's that got to do with me?” But I'm also completely confident that others of you know exactly what that has to do with you, because—at least at **some** point in your 9 to 5—that's exactly how you feel—like a slave!

And maybe it's not even your boss or your work situation, per se, that leaves you feeling that way. Maybe it's just the reason you're working in the first place. You wouldn't work that job ... or work that way—that many hours, perhaps ... if you didn't you have to. But **life** has you at that spot ... and you simply feel you have no choice!

Or maybe it **is** your boss ... your workplace. Maybe you're sure you're nothing more to your company than another piece of equipment ... that the minute there's a tool that'll do your job better, faster, cheaper ... you'll be history ... and that, in the meantime, all

they want to do is grind as much out of you as they can! You're not a person to them—you're just a wrench ... a calculator ... an answering machine.

The Apostle Paul has a word from the Lord for you, my friend—because it's a word for labor offered under even the most distressing circumstances... (“Slaves...”)

(Now is this where I need to stop and say—this exhortation applies whether your labor is extorted from you on a job you hate ... or you offer it joyfully as part of a job you love! The exhortation stands—even in a job you hate ... even under circumstances you would change completely were it within your power to do so—because surely that was the situation for at least some of the slaves to whom Paul writes. To “slaves,” there is a challenge...and a promise...)

*[22] Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.
(Colossians 3:22 NIV)*

“Earthly masters,” of course, suggests that maybe some other master is a part of this equation, as well. Paul challenges workers to diligence not only when the boss is looking, but even when you think the boss *isn't* looking. He calls for “sincerity of heart”—a singleness of intention in your work ... a focus of purpose. (I think that's tied to the purposeful calling we talked about last Sunday.) And, yes, even your labor should be done with “reverence for the Lord.” (How would you wait a table if it were Jesus you were waiting on? How would you bus that same table if it were Jesus you were picking up after? “...with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.”)

[23] Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters... (Colossians 3:23 NIV)

There it is again! A reminder that there's a master greater than any human master—that *your* boss (whether he or she recognizes it or not) answers to a greater boss—ultimately, to the highest power of all.

And before you get too happily vindictive about that (“Can't wait—God's gonna show them a thing or two!”) ... so do we! We answer to the King, as well. And our work, ultimately, is not just to earn a paycheck or advance a career or make a name. It is, ultimately, an offering to the Lord. You, too, are working “for the Lord, not for human masters!”

But we work “not only when [their] eyes are on us” or “to curry favor” ... we work “with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord” ... we work “with all our hearts, as working for the Lord” because our work is rich with promise! Verse 23 again...

[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. (Colossians 3:23-24 NIV)

Oh, here's something I want you to know:

Your paycheck is bigger than you think!

Here's a little secret: There's a second set of books! Your employer has a set of books. The IRS is looking over your employer's shoulder to make sure those books are tidily kept!

But there's a second set of books the IRS doesn't know anything about! There's a second set of books your employer will never access. The King of Kings has an account with your name on it (you're not a number to Him...only the hairs on your head)! And He's keeping track! He's making notes! And here's His promise for diligent, God-centered, pure-hearted, "I'm offering my work to Jesus most of all" workers—

"You will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward."

This word "inheritance"—the word that gets translated "inheritance" here—I don't have time to explain it in depth, but there's an "end-time" character to the word when it's used in the New Testament—an "eschatological" character (for those who've been part of the discussion groups). Using that particular word here (the Greek word is "kleronomias" if it matters) ...using that word ties this passage to this very thing we've been saying about our future in Christ and bringing future realities into this present age.

This word in *this* context tell me that it's not just the stuff I might consider "spiritual" that gives me the opportunity to express and advance God's future Kingdom in the here and now. It's not just the time I spend in personal devotions ... or volunteering at church. Rather, it includes, even, the quite ordinary and earthy and practical labor I offer on the job—under Christ's reign, even my "9 to 5" becomes a means of (1) serving divine purpose and (2) advancing a heavenly Kingdom!

"Working for the Lord" certainly involves exhibiting the kind of character qualities that the Scriptures encourage—Paul has identified several of those himself in the opening verses of this chapter. But the eschatological character of "kleronomias" encourages us to understand our human labor as a means of anticipating and expressing God's coming kingdom in the here and now. Our work becomes a way of anticipating and striving toward the realization of the Kingdom of heaven on earth!

When I weld, I lay down a bead that I'd be happy to present to Jesus.

When I care for a patient, I offer the kind of generous care I expect to be the norm when Jesus reigns without rival over a new heaven and a new earth.

When I drive a nail or finish a concrete pad or calculate a profit or instruct a student or help a buyer find just the right car or finish a tax return or build a tire or sweep the shop floor or decorate a cake...when I do it just like I'd expect to do it in the New Jerusalem when

that day comes ... I'm *making* the future a reality now! I'm quite literally seeing Christ's kingdom come ... Christ's will done ... on earth as it is in heaven.

And I'm helping to march this world toward its consummation in Christ! I am (as a guy named Murray Dempster put it)...

"...participating in Kingdom-signifying deeds of anticipatory transformation..."

And that work—that work—is never lost! (Says Dempster,) these “are the kinds of human effort that God preserves, sanctifies and directs teleologically toward the future age of God's redemptive reign.”

Murray Dempster didn't just make that up ... pull it out of a head filled with rich imaginings. Scripture says so. What's built (1 Cor says) with “wood, hay or straw” will not survive the refining fire that consumes this earth. But the Scriptures promise that...

Their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work.
(1 Corinthians 3:13 NIV)

... God's refining fire will test the quality of each person's work ... and what is built using “gold, silver, costly stones” will survive! And *when* it survives...

...the builder will receive a reward.
(1 Corinthians 3:14 NIV)

I am pointing you toward a shift in the focus of your work. Honestly, for many of us, work probably doesn't have a focus. We do our jobs to earn a living ... like it, love it, or hate it, it is what it is ... and we have a hard time seeing it being anything else.

But the Scriptures we've looked at over the last few weeks have shown me that both *my* work and *your* work has its foundation in creation itself—the past—and finds meaning in our present redemption and the call of God that redemption brings (the present). Today I want to move you from the past and even the present ... toward the future. Toward the “kingdom-signifying deeds of anticipatory transformation” you can engage in through your work. Toward every moment on your job being an action that looks forward to Jesus' return and Jesus' unchallenged reign in a world just full of His righteousness. I want to point you toward ...

9 – 5 'till Kingdom Come

I used the word “eschatological” a few minutes ago. It's a word that has to do with end times ... with “last things” ... with how time as we know it wraps up and eternity (and the unchallenged reign of Jesus our King) is ushered in. Here's a sentence or two for you to consider as I'm wrapping things up this morning. They're the words of Miroslav Volf – a

Croatian theologian who's become one of my favorite thinkers. He loves Jesus. He loves the reality of the present gift and activity of the Holy Spirit. And he says about all of this...

“At its core, Christian faith is eschatological. Christian life is life in the Spirit of the new creation or it is not Christian life at all. ... Christian work must, therefore, be done under the inspiration of the Spirit and in light of the coming new creation.”

~ Miroslav Volf

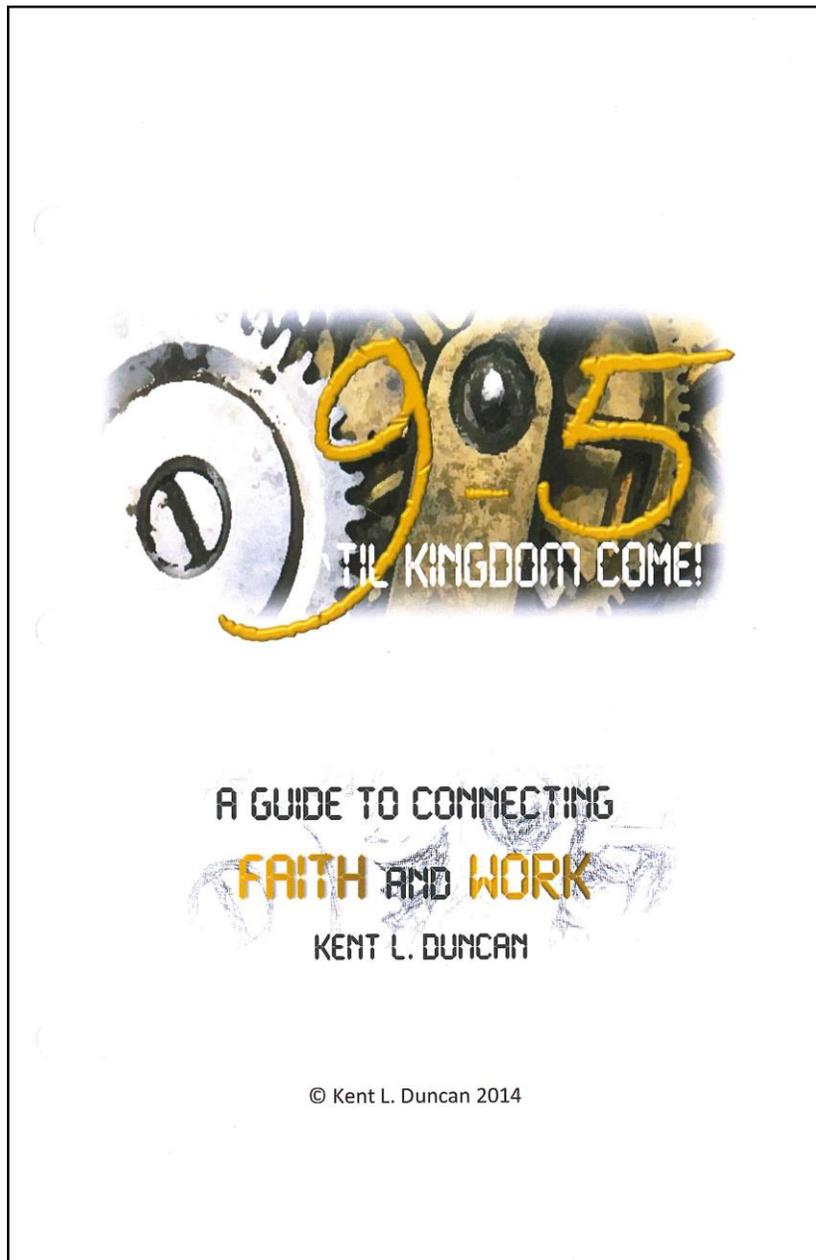
I want our work to be grounded in the history of our creation. I want our work to be rooted in the present of our redemption. But oh, how I long for our work to be pointed toward ... shaped by ... representative of ... our future—that future where everything about this world finds its consummation in Christ! Let my work be marked by the kind of righteousness – the kind of justice and shalom – the rightness and integrated peace – that will mark this world when *everything* Jesus lived, died, and rose again to accomplish will be reality! It is...

God's Gift of Future

APPENDIX E: “9 – 5 ‘TIL KINGDOM COME”

DISCUSSION GUIDES

Discussion Guide Cover



Week 1 Discussion Guide

9-5 'TIL KINGDOM COME!

SESSION 1

LET'S GET ACQUAINTED!

Tell us something about yourself by answering one of the following questions...

How'd you end up with the job you've got?

What's the best part of the work you do?

What's the worst day on the job you've ever had?

What do you do/make at your job?

If you could have the perfect job, what would it be?

WORK AS GOD'S GIFT

1. Read Genesis 2:8-17. This passage shows that Adam had work-related responsibilities even in the Garden of Eden. What does this suggest to you about the nature of work? How do you imagine Adam's experience of labor in the Garden of Eden?

2. Genesis 1:27 says that humanity is created "in the image of God." Ancient creation accounts from other cultures use that phrase as well, but only of a nation's king as their god's representative over the land. What do you think is the significance, then, of Genesis describing *every human* as formed "in the image of God"?

GOD'S PURPOSE FOR WORK

3. In Genesis 1:28, Adam's assignment is to "fill the earth and subdue it" ... to "rule over" it. In Genesis 2:15, Adam is directed to "work" and "take care of" the Garden of Eden. How does this relate to God's creative activity in Genesis, chapter 1?

4. The Hebrew words translated “work” and “take care of” in Genesis 2:15 are the same words used throughout the Old Testament for the ministry of Israel’s priests. What does this tell you about how God views human labor?

6. Andy Crouch suggests that, over the last 100 years or so, Christians have typically reacted to culture in one of four ways—by (1) condemning, (2) critiquing, (3) copying, or simply (4) consuming it. He suggests a fifth possibility: cultivating culture. How do Adam’s responsibilities to cultivate and create within the Garden shape your thoughts about God’s purpose in your work?

5. G. Charles Aalders suggests that “caring for” the Garden included defending it against “hostile forces.”¹ Bruce Waltke agrees, declaring that “as priest and guardians of the garden, Adam and Eve should have driven out the serpent.”² These comments suggest that Adam’s responsibilities in the garden, included not only the cultivation of the ground but also the defense of God’s territory. In what way do your work responsibilities reflect these of Adam?

MY RESPONSE TO GOD’S PURPOSEFUL GIFT

7. In what ways might you view your work differently this week in light of the Scriptures we’ve looked at today?

¹ G. Charles Aalders, *Genesis, The Bible Student’s Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 92.

² Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001), 87.

Week 2 Discussion Guide

9-5 'til Kingdom Come!

SESSION 2

LET'S GET ACQUAINTED!

(Recognizing that leisure and Sabbath are two different things), what's your favorite leisure activity, hobby, or pastime?

What's the weirdest "Sabbath rule" you've ever heard of?

As a worker made in the image of God, how do you observe Sabbath for yourself? With others? Why?

What do others know about your Sabbath and why you practice it?

Note: While considering these questions, please remember: Sabbath observance is more than just "church attendance."

OBSERVING THE SABBATH

1. Bruce Waltke says, "In the first six days, space is subdued; on the seventh, time is sanctified." What seems distinct to you about the seventh day versus the other six?

SABBATH AS TESTIMONY

2. All sorts of labor-reducing, time-saving devices have been created in recent decades. Recent advancements have made communication almost instantaneous. The internet puts information, education, social connection, household services, and entertainment at our fingertips. Still, many people seem more pressed for time than ever. What does our practice of Sabbath say to an increasingly time-crunched culture? How can our practice of Sabbath affect us as we seek to live God-honoring lives in that same culture?
3. On the seventh day, God rested—marking His work of creation and establishing a pattern for Sabbath rest. Israel—newly created by God—testified to her unique standing with God through the same. Jesus himself faithfully observed the Sabbath (Luke 4:16). How important is it for us, as a "new creation" in Christ, to develop a life marked by Sabbath rest?

4. Since Sabbath has to do with “ceasing,” Sabbath-related questions often center on what that means—on a suitable definition of “work” not to be done. Tilden Edwards suggests that “the principle involved here ... is not so much the physical nature of an activity but its purpose.” If the restful intent of Sabbath time is to recognize our dependence on God, what kind of work (or other activity) can be done on a day of Sabbath rest?

SABBATH AS CELEBRATION

5. *Sabbath*, according to Willem VanGemeren, is not a word that refers to “remedying exhaustion after a tiring week of work. Rather, it describes the enjoyment of accomplishment, the celebration of completion.” How does this truth inform your understanding and practice of Sabbath rest?

SABBATH AS IDENTITY

6. People develop and express personal identity in a variety of ways. In what ways do you see a commitment to Sabbath observance developing your identity? In what ways does Sabbath observance express your identity? How would this be different from the ways other people express and build their identities?

SABBATH AS PROMISE

7. In the New Testament book of Hebrews, the author announces that “the promise of entering his rest still stands” (Hebrews 4:1) and encourages believers to “make every effort to enter that rest” (Hebrews 4:11). Harold Dressler suggests that, even at creation, the Sabbath was “an eschatological, proleptic sign indicating some future rest.” In what ways does practicing Sabbath rest today anticipate the Sabbath rest promised eternally through Christ?

MY RESPONSE TO GOD'S GIFT OF SABBATH

In what ways might you view your work—and your rest—differently this week in light of these Scriptures?

Week 3 Discussion Guide

9-5 'til Kingdom Come!

SESSION 3

LET'S GET ACQUAINTED!

What is the most "creative" part of your work?

When you were first hired what, if any, was your biggest challenge?

When someone new comes on the job what is a key thing that you have to teach them?

Tell of a time when you have added wisdom to your tasks at work.

GOD'S PURPOSEFUL CALLING

1. Read Exodus 31:1-11. Filled with the Spirit, Bezalel and Oholiab shaped and assembled raw materials to construct a tabernacle. Bible Scholars suggest that their labor echoes God's labor in forming the world (Genesis 1). Assuming that's so, can you see *your* work displaying that same connection? In what ways?
2. According to Exodus 31:1-6, God chose Bezalel and filled him with His Spirit purposefully. How would you describe God's purpose in Bezalel's call? What conclusions might you draw about God's purpose in calling *you* to the work you do?
3. R. Paul Stevens suggests we're called "to *Someone* before we're called to do *something*." How does your relationship with Christ precede and shape your calling as a worker?

GOD'S BOUNTIFUL EQUIPPING

4. The Scriptures consistently reveal God's ability and readiness to supply generously. In what ways is your work marked by God's generosity in equipping? Are you able to make God's abundance a consistent part of your work experience? If so, what evidence of this God-confidence can be seen?

5. "[Spiritual] gifts in the new creation," writes Terry Cross, "do not only serve a sacred, invisible realm, but also serve the physical needs of humanity". In what ways can you see God's gifts serving His purposes through you on the job?

GOD'S COSMIC CONNECTING

6. God's purposeful call and generous equipping connect our work to His cosmic plan as He gifts and places us to continue His creative activity in the world. In what ways do you see your work connected with God's? In what ways do you see your work connected to other people?

7. What difference does a sense of God's calling make when you consider your work as rooted in His call, blessed by His abundance, and connected to His plan?

MY RESPONSE TO GOD'S GIFT OF ABILITY

In what ways might you view your work differently this week in light of these Scriptures?

Week 4 Discussion Guide

9-5 'TIL KINGDOM COME!

SESSION 4

LET'S GET ACQUAINTED!

What is the most satisfying part of your work?

How do you spiritually prepare for your workday?

What have you told God recently about your job?
(The tasks you perform, your job position, your relationship with co-workers)

What do you look forward to as reward at the end of your work years?

THE PRESENT FUTURE

1. Based on the significance of passages like Luke 4:17-21 and Acts 2, our study suggests the very nature of the age in which we live is transformed by the ministry of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Think about these changes and give three or four implications that result.

A NEW EARTH

2. In a recent book, Amy Sherman describes our promised future as marked by two key elements—"justice and shalom." About justice, she writes, "The justice of God is all about restoring wholeness in relationships—with God and with other human beings."¹ In what ways do you have opportunity on the job to work toward this justice?
3. A second element Amy identifies in our promised future is "shalom"—something she suggests finds expression in four quadrants: peace with God, self, others, and creation. When you think about this "shalom" as an expression of Christ's Kingdom, where do you see your work fitting in?
4. Read 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1-4. These Scriptures suggests a more "down to earth" eternity than we might ordinarily think. Rather than the destruction of this earth and our "escape" to heaven, verses like 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1 describe "a new heaven and a new earth." In what ways does the thought of an "earthly" eternity change your ideas about the future?

¹ Amy L. Sherman, *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 32.

5. Consider Jesus' resurrected body. In what ways was it like His pre-resurrection body? In what ways was it different? What might Jesus' glorified body tell us about what life in eternity will be like for us?

7. When we work giving attention to Christ's coming Kingdom, Murray Dempster says we participate in "kingdom-signifying deeds of anticipatory transformation." Further, he declares that these "are the kinds of human effort that God preserves, sanctifies and directs teleologically* toward the future age of God's redemptive reign."³ Think about your work as "prophetic". How does it change your understanding as you consider the possibility that God will redeem and preserve such labor?

**teleological: having to do with ultimate purpose or design*

WORKING 'TIL (HIS) KINGDOM COME

6. Describing how our work can be shaped and motivated by an awareness of Christ's kingdom, Darrell Cosden says, "work becomes a type of eschatological* mandate rather than simply a creation mandate."² How does it change your understanding of work when you focus forward toward our full redemption as compared to looking backward to the stories of Adam and Bezalel?

** eschatological: dealing with ultimate or final things; within Christianity, having to do with the destiny of humanity, the Second Coming, or the Last Judgment.*

MY RESPONSE TO GOD'S GIFT OF FUTURE

What action might you apply to your work this week in light of these Scriptures?

² Darrell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), 46.

³ Murray Dempster, "Christian Social Concern in Pentecostal Perspective" (presented at the Conference of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Lakeland, FL, 1991), 36.

APPENDIX F: POST-PROJECT INTERVIEW FORM

This form was utilized for conducting follow-up assessment interviews.

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

HOW HAVE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT WORK CHANGED OVER THE LAST 30 DAYS OR SO?
WHAT'S DIFFERENT FOR YOU WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT YOUR JOB TODAY VERSUS WHAT YOU THOUGHT A MONTH AGO?

KEY THOUGHTS: WORK IS . . .

1. Not a curse but . . .
2. Part of God's gift of a perfect world to us
3. A reflection of what it means to be made in His image
4. A means of filling and subduing the earth in His authority

HOW HAS YOUR PERCEPTION OF THE SABBATH CHANGED?
CAN YOU IDENTIFY ANY WAYS IN WHICH YOU ARE "OBSERVING THE SABBATH" DIFFERENTLY THAN YOU WERE BEFORE PARTICIPATING IN 9-5?
IF YOU COULD CHANGE ONE THING ABOUT THE WAY YOU PRACTICE SABBATH REST, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

KEY THOUGHTS: SABBATH REST SERVES AS . . .

1. A testimony –a way to say we belong to God
2. An opportunity for celebration, giving the time and space needed in our lives to worship God
3. A tool for building identity ("externally" as people see us practice Sabbath rest and "internally" practicing Sabbath rest changes us)
4. A prophetic of the expression of the eternal rest promised the people of God

WHAT NEW UNDERSTANDING DO YOU HAVE OF THE PLACE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN YOUR WORK?
CAN YOU DESCRIBE WAYS IN WHICH YOU SEE YOUR WORK CONNECTED TO WHAT GOD IS DOING IN THE WORLD?

KEY THOUGHTS: THE HOLY SPIRIT . . .

1. Calls us to specific tasks through the gifts God gives us
2. Empowers us to do the tasks with Kingdom effectiveness
3. Connects us in partnership with what God is doing Himself
and through others in the world

HOW IS YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF HEAVEN DIFFERENT THAN IT WAS TWO MONTHS AGO?
WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT ETERNITY, DO YOU IMAGINE WORK AS A PART OF IT?
IF SO, WHAT CONNECTIONS DO YOU SEE BETWEEN WORK TODAY AND WORK IN ETERNITY?

KEY THOUGHTS: THE GOSPEL REGARDING ETERNITY . . .

1. Is not so much about us going to heaven, but about heaven coming to earth
2. Reveals that when Jesus reigns over a new heaven and new earth,
work will continue to be a part of the way we serve God
3. Indicates the work we do now anticipates and expresses His kingdom
and will continue to be refined, redeemed, and renewed forevermore
in His kingdom come.

APPENDIX G: POST-PROJECT INTERVIEW NOTES

This appendix contains a transcription of notes made during post-field intervention interviews with twenty-three 9 – 5 *‘til Kingdom Come* participants three weeks after the conclusion of the series. In each table, interview questions are followed by participant responses, either in the form of direct quotes as recorded from the respondent, a summary restatement of the respondent’s thoughts as perceived by the interviewer, or a combination of both.

Responses to Question 1

<i>Question</i>	<i>How have your thoughts about work changed over the last thirty days or so? What’s different for you when you think about your job today versus what you thought a month ago?</i>
Response	Respondent spoke of a “re-awareness” of Kingdom purpose on the job.
Response	Respondent described a fresh sense of “accountability to God for how I do my job—though it is still a ‘job.’”
Response	Respondent described how, looking around her work aware of God’s purpose, her work became “bigger”—she had “influence.” She doesn’t particularly “like” her actual job so these comments were directed at the “culture” around her. She saw the opportunity to influence the culture of her workplace.
Response	Absolute change ... joyful, happy to be here “called in to see the boss, called on the carpet for being ‘just too happy.’”
Response	Respondent described a new awareness of purpose – “It’s great to know I’m not just ‘putting in my time.’”
Response	Respondent described a new freedom to be authentic as a believer, as a God-follower.
Response	“I am happiest at my work when I accomplish and complete my work and do that well. I need others to accomplish that, so I encourage them to do their jobs well. I know God is in that. I’m unhappy when I don’t do well.” Respondent expressed understanding of the continuity of his work as part of others’ lives.
Response	“This filled my understanding of work with a whole new purpose. I spent a long, stressful time lining up with corporate goals. Now I’m lined up with God’s goals.”
Response	Respondent made aware of God’s place in the job in a way that causes him to treat people differently.
Response	“I hated my job to the place of being physically sick. Grasping this concept of Kingdom work changed my heart and influenced the rest of my team. Opportunities abounded because I ‘saw’ them.”
Response	“I had been struggling with contentment on the job – “9 – 5” came along – completely changed the way I looked at the ‘job’ – bigger, not just the job but also the relationships. When guys complain about ‘work,’ I have something to tell them. I’m happy for work done.”
Response	Respondent described an acute awareness of Kingdom purpose “It’s humbling to realize I am

	reflecting God in my daily work –that I’m created in His image and doing what He created me for.
Response	“I’m bringing things into being – creating – supplying I’m not just cutting dog food can labels. It is bigger than that!”
Response	Has always known God’s gift of work—inherited from her father’s love of work. Her work shapes and changes others’ lives (house cleaning) – renewed joy in helping (using her gifts).

Responses to Question 2

<i>Question</i>	<i>How has your perception of the Sabbath changed? Can you identify any ways in which you are “observing the Sabbath” differently than you were before participating in 9 – 5? If you could change one thing about the way you practice Sabbath rest, what would it be?</i>
Response	Respondent saw Sabbath as a ritual, a “to do” (happily done, but on auto-pilot). Now she experiences deliberately looking forward to the Sabbath – anticipating refreshing.
Response	“I find I have ‘focus.’ I had treated Sabbath as ‘got to’ – as though I were going to work. Now I realize I ‘get to.’” (Specifically, she gets to get up early to worship, to serve with her gifts, to celebrate – and, she says, “it makes me different.”)
Response	“I’m looking now for ways to be deliberate in Sabbath practice.”
Response	Downtime used to be just “vegetative” or being “busy”—now downtime is spent in God’s Word, prayer, going over the week.”
Response	Everyone at work knows he will be deliberately setting aside Sunday as a “different” day—a Sabbath. People pile up wealth and think of themselves all week—and continue the same on Sunday. “I believe people are jealous of my Sabbath—convicted by it.”
Response	“This portion affected me greatly. Sabbath is [now] intentional time set aside with family—teaching children, reading the Bible, etc.”
Response	“Convicted about Sabbath busy-ness” (Observed that it used to be that church meetings filled a Sabbath). “Now we take the time to minister to our bodies, ourselves. The Sabbath had begun to look like other days and needed to be different.”
Response	“I’m more conscious of the Sabbath, but working through how to ‘set it aside.’”
Response	“I’ve reviewed my Sabbath—and am excited to do so. I’m asking myself, ‘Is this rest to me?’ ‘Has my Sabbath rest become work?’ I’ve awakened Sabbath questions—spiritual, emotional; not so much what I do.”
Response	Anxious about the freedom of Sabbath taught—so looking at “What should it look like?” Feels “Sabbath” has been ritualistic and legalistic—“If I do it properly, I am blessed.”
Response	(From a couple) “We’ve established non-negotiables to make sure the Sabbath day is different.”

Responses to Question 3

<i>Question</i>	<i>What new understanding do you have of the place of the Holy Spirit in your work? Can you describe ways in which you see your work connected to what God is doing in the world?</i>
Response	“Though the ‘job’ is not what I imagined (I am ‘underwhelmed’), I realize God has given it to me and I have learned through the Holy Spirit that I am ‘gifted’ in ‘customer service’—settling disputes, calming situations, talking through problems.” This respondent sees God using this spot to teach her for the future—especially about who she is. In her lack of busy work, she has used the time to pray, think, and write about her experiences.
Response	Respondent walks from job to job in the plant—a lot—and in a job that requires significant multitasking. He believes God empowers him to remember details, observe outcomes, and then encourage right ways in new Christians. He is the “old Christian” at work, and—when he sees young believers cut corners or do not-so-perfect work, he will say, “No shortcuts. You’re working for God now.” He prays particularly for those in positions of authority who abuse that power. The Holy Spirit has taught him to see change.
Response	Respondent has always enjoyed and felt responsible for mentoring “newbies”—many have tremendous difficulties outside of work. She presses for quality and timeliness regardless of their circumstances. She has realized this is ministry—to teach the job.

Response	Respondent very aware of the Holy Spirit at work to help her accomplish tasks that seem overwhelming...and then aware that those lives she impacts on the job impact others: "What I have at the end of the day ministers to others in their homes."
Response	"The Holy Spirit is recognized by others...even if we don't respond, people 'know.' He influences and changes lives through His work with us in our work. The Holy Spirit has revealed my relationship [with Christ] to co-workers—a new dimension for me."
Response	"We were created to work and work is worship. The Holy Spirit is always in our worship, so the Holy Spirit is always on the job."
Response	"The Spirit is the energy—the power—to 'do.' We have His gifts and abilities. We access the power to do so 24/7."
Response	I remember who I serve, who is my boss—I'm working for God. I want to please Him because I love Him. A job well done, no matter what it is, gives pleasure, joy, satisfaction. God gives that also. Following the Holy Spirit brings good results."
Response	Respondent talks to people all over the country on his job—mainly elderly people about to give up (or already having given up) possessions. Religion and politics always are topics of conversation.
Response	Respondent has a clearer understanding that the Holy Spirit is not separate from our workplace. She would always pray for her job and issues associated but then would be on her own to carry on the work. But He accompanies us through the workday—and people know and see.

Responses to Question 4

<i>Question</i>	<i>How is your understanding of heaven different than it was two months ago? When you think about eternity, do you imagine work as a part of it? If so, what connections do you see between work today and work in eternity?</i>
Response	"I'm not escaping from here, from work. But I can enjoy and embrace a new heaven and a new earth."
Response	Likes the idea that his work is actually part of something spectacular—that he is helping God to build His Kingdom.
Response	Had seen heaven as a giant sanctuary where we couldn't help but stand and worship 24/7—"much like the last night of Fine Arts Nationals." The idea of work continuing in a new earth excited her.
Response	"I may have a mansion, but I can go to the country and walk the fields!"
Response	"We see perfection every day but don't pay attention. As a result, we're dull to hints of heaven already all around us."
Response	"...being a part of something bigger that continues and changes forever."
Response	Respondent thought a lot about how we treat this earth—questions about quality and concern about how we live—how the things we do change the environment here and now.
Response	"Our abilities continue through eternity—refined, redeemed, renewed!" Several participants affirmed that they found this an exciting, joyful thought.
Response	"Wow! I'm excited! Excited that someone would step away from the old 'we're gonna believe this.' The box is open; we're in the game! Here and now!"
Response	"We race toward Sunday for the blessing. Don't throw six days away—it's all now!"
Response	"Worship is more than singing songs—it's walking, observing, creating, enjoying, working! These things are not destroyed, but refined, transformed, and deepened."
Response	"God didn't create the earth and all that is in it and say, 'It's no good, I hate it—but I'll use it for now. No, he rejoiced over it! We have a responsibility for it now.'"
Response	"I've always been a 'doer'—and have always been concerned about being flat-out bored in heaven. I'm pleased to know the value of work and that I'm going to be busy in heaven!"

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