

Work: A Job Made in Heaven

You do not have to have a perfect job to serve God! Although God does bless some people with wonderful careers, He does not promise us a job made in heaven. This lesson will teach you God's purpose for work and how to honor Him, even in what the world considers to be an ordinary job. You will be encouraged to use the abilities God has given you in the job where He has placed you.

Starter

1. When you were little, what did you want to be when you grew up?
2. What is the best job you have ever had?

Study

Read the following three sets of Bible passages and application notes. Answer the questions for each set before moving on to the next.

Genesis 3:17-19

And to the man he said, "Since you listened to your wife and ate from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat, the ground is cursed because of you. All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it. It will grow thorns and thistles for you, though you will eat of its grains. By the sweat of your brow will you have food to eat until you return to the ground from which you were made. For you were made from dust and to dust you will return."

Work is God's idea. After God created Adam, He placed Adam in charge of caring for the Garden of Eden. The work was enjoyable and completely fulfilling. But when Adam and Eve sinned, they were kicked out of Eden, and their work became a struggle against the elements in order to provide food, clothing, and shelter for themselves and their family. Work was no longer refreshing and delightful but a curse, involving painful toil. Today, we are still under this curse, but it is possible to experience moments of satisfaction in our work. If we are searching for the perfect job, however, we will only be disappointed. Every job will involve frustration and toil. But we should strive to do our best and honor God in our work.

3. Why do you think so many people are unfulfilled or dissatisfied in their jobs?
4. Why is it important to realize that work is created by God but spoiled by sin?
5. What struggles or challenges do you face at work?

6. How does this passage enable you to face those difficulties?

Matthew 25:14-15, 19-21

“Again, the Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. He called together his servants and entrusted his money to them while he was gone. He gave five bags of silver to one, two bags of silver to another, and one bag of silver to the last – dividing it in proportion to their abilities. He then left on his trip. . . .

“After a long time their master returned from his trip and called them to give an account of how they had used his money. The servant to whom he had entrusted the five bags of silver came forward with five more and said, ‘Master, you gave me five bags of silver to invest, and I have earned five more.’

“The master was full of praise. ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let’s celebrate together!’”

Jesus is coming back – we know that is true. Does this mean we should quit our jobs in order to serve God? No, it means we are to use what we have well until He returns. The talents in this parable represent any kind of resource we are given. God gives us time, gifts, money, and other resources according to our abilities. He expects us to use them wisely. For a few people, this may mean changing professions. For most of us, it means doing our daily work out of love for God. You are responsible to use well the talents God has given you.

7. When have you been tempted to quit your job? Why?

8. What is one skill or talent that God has given you?

9. How does that skill help you fulfill your responsibilities at work?

10. How can you make better use of the talents God has given you?

1 Corinthians 7:20-22

Yes, each of you should remain as you were when God called you. Are you a slave? Don’t let that worry you – but if you get a chance to be free, take it. And remember, if you were a slave when the Lord called you, you are now free in the Lord. And if you were free when the Lord called you, you are now a slave of Christ.

Apparently the Corinthians were making sweeping changes without thinking through the ramifications. Paul wrote to say that people should be Christians where God has

placed them. You can do God’s work and demonstrate your faith anywhere. Often we are so concerned about what we could be doing for God elsewhere that we miss great opportunities right here and now. Paul says that when someone becomes a Christian, he or she should usually continue with the work he or she has previously been doing—provided it isn’t immoral or unethical. Don’t assume that you are in the wrong line of work. You may be just exactly where God wants you.

11. In what way can your work also be a ministry?

12. How can you know if your job is the one that God wants you to have?

13. What commonsense advice would you give to a new believer who finds him- or herself in the wrong line of work?

14. How can you ensure that you are doing your work for God’s glory?

Summary

Scripture does not tell us how to find the “perfect” job, but it does tell us that no job is perfect anymore. Work was created by God but spoiled by the Fall. God gives us work to do and asks us to do it for His glory. We should carefully explore the gifts God has given us and find work to match those gifts and then commit ourselves to faithfully complete our work.

15. What could you do differently this week that would bring honor to God through your work?

Supplemental Questions

Read Exodus 35:30-36:7:

Then Moses told the people of Israel, “The Lord has specifically chosen Bezalel son of Uri, grandson of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. The Lord has filled Bezalel with the Spirit of God, giving him great wisdom, ability, and expertise in all kinds of crafts. He is a master craftsman, expert in working with gold, silver, and bronze. He is skilled in engraving and mounting gemstones and in carving wood. He is a master at every craft. And the Lord has given both him and Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, the ability to teach their skills to others. The Lord has given them special skills as engravers, designers, embroiderers in blue, purple, and scarlet thread on fine linen cloth, and weavers. They excel as craftsmen and as designers.

“The Lord has gifted Bezalel, Oholiab, and the other skilled craftsmen with wisdom and ability to perform any task involved in building the sanctuary. Let them construct and furnish the Tabernacle, just as the Lord has commanded.”

So Moses summoned Bezalel and Oholiab and all the others who were specially gifted by the Lord and were eager to get to work. Moses gave them the materials donated by the people of Israel as sacred offerings for the completion of the sanctuary. But the people continued to bring additional gifts each morning. Finally the craftsmen who were working on the sanctuary left their work. They went to Moses and reported, “The people have given more than enough materials to complete the job the Lord has commanded us to do!”

So Moses gave the command, and this message was sent throughout the camp: “Men and women, don’t prepare any more gifts for the sanctuary. We have enough!” So the people stopped bringing their sacred offerings. Their contributions were more than enough to complete the whole project.

This passage describes the blending of various artistic and construction skills in the building of the traveling sanctuary. It is easy to think that God would provide people with “spiritual” abilities like leadership, preaching, and healing to serve in the tabernacle. And yet Bezalel was filled with God’s Spirit in such a way that all his artistic and design skills took on an added quality appropriate to the work he was called to do. God is the source of our skills, and he wants us to use them. Even if our work is not what we think of as “spiritual,” it can still be done to God’s glory.

16. Why do we tend to think that only spiritual work is worthwhile?

17. What do you do well that some or many would not consider spiritual?

18. How can you change the way you work to better employ the creative abilities God has given you?

Read 2 Samuel 5:12:

And David realized that the Lord had confirmed him as king over Israel and had blessed his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel.

Although the pagan kingdoms based their greatness on conquest, power, and wealth, David knew that his greatness came only from God. He kept his ambition under control by keeping a close relationship with God. Although he was famous, successful, and well liked, David gave God first place in his life and served the people according to God’s purposes.

19. How can ambition keep us from serving God in our work?
20. How can we keep our ambition under control?
21. What can you do at work to acknowledge God and fulfill his purposes?

Read Isaiah 45:1:

This is what the Lord says to Cyrus, his anointed one, whose right hand he will empower. Before him, mighty kings will be paralyzed with fear. Their fortress gates will be opened, never to shut again.

This is the only place in the Bible where a Gentile ruler is said to be “anointed.” God anointed Cyrus because he had a special task for him to do for Israel. Cyrus allowed God’s city, Jerusalem, to be rebuilt, and he set the exiles free to resettle there. Few kings of Israel or Judah did as much for God’s people as Cyrus did.

22. What does it mean to be anointed by God for a special task?
23. How does God call us to work for him today?
24. What can Christians do if they feel they have missed God’s calling for their life?

Read John 3:22-30:

Then Jesus and his disciples left Jerusalem and went into the Judean countryside. Jesus spent some time with them there, baptizing people.

At this time John the Baptist was baptizing at Aenon, near Salim, because there was plenty of water there; and people kept coming to him for baptism. (This was before John was thrown into prison.) A debate broke out between John’s disciples and a certain Jew over ceremonial cleansing. So John’s disciples came to him and said, “Rabbi, the man you met on the other side of the Jordan River, the one you identified as the Messiah, is also baptizing people. And everybody is going to him instead of coming to us.”

John replied, “No one can receive anything unless God gives it from heaven. You yourselves know how plainly I told you, ‘I am not the Messiah. I am only here to prepare the way for him.’ It is the bridegroom who marries the bride, and the best man is simply glad to stand with him and hear his vows. Therefore, I am filled with joy at his success. He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.

John's main purpose was to point people to Christ. His disciples wondered why He continued to baptize people even after Jesus came onto the scene. John explained that because God had given him his work, he had to continue it until God called him to do something else. Even with Jesus beginning His own ministry, John could still do the job God had given him.

25. What does John's response to his disciples reveal about his attitude toward work?

26. Is it easy or difficult for you to stay humble in your line of work? What helps you to stay humble?

27. How can we keep from becoming distracted or sidetracked from the work God gives us?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:58:

So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless.

Paul says that because of the Resurrection, nothing we do is in vain. Sometimes we hesitate to commit ourselves fully to our work because we do not see any results. But if we maintain a heavenly perspective, we will not expect to always see the good that results from our efforts. Do not let discouragement over an apparent lack of results keep you from working hard. Do the good that you have the opportunity to do, knowing that your work will have eternal results. Be confident that when you work for God, all your effort is worthwhile.

28. What kind of work is never a waste of time?

29. In light of this passage, how can we deal with discouragement on the job?

30. How can you remind yourself of this passage the next time you feel discouraged about your work?

This study is adapted from Work: Life Application Bible Studies (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1996).