

GOSPEL-CENTRED
WORK

Becoming the worker God wants you to be



by Tim Chester

Gospel-Centred Work

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INTRODUCTION

Work is a big feature of the lives of most of us. Many go off to the factory, workshop, shop, office or classroom each morning. Others are at home looking after the house or children. An increasing number of people have a number of part-time jobs or work shifts.

Most people in full-time employment work about 40 hours a week. Some work much longer. That's at least a third of our waking hours. And when you add in the other work we do, like household chores, then we probably spend more than half our time working. We certainly spend more time working than on any other activity. Work is a big deal in our lives.

That means that if we want to be gospel-centred people living gospel-centred lives then we need to think through what gospel-centred work involves. What does it mean to live for Jesus in the workplace?

We need to connect Sunday morning and Monday morning. On Sunday morning we sing about God's love and power. But what does it mean to live in the light of God's love and power in an often hostile and pressured workplace? Is the person who sings God's praises on Sunday the same person on Monday when they face a difficult problem or an awkward customer or colleague?

That's what this book is about: a gospel-centred approach to the world of work. You can read it on your own. The short chapters mean you could readily read a chapter each morning on the commute to work. Or you could read it as part of a small group—perhaps a home group or a work-based fellowship. The Bible studies and discussion questions offer something for you to discuss together.

Finding your way around



Consider this

A scenario—often based on a real-life situation—which raises some kind of dilemma or frustration in our working lives.



Biblical background

A relevant Bible passage together with some questions to help you think it through.



Read all about it

A discussion of the principle, both in terms of its theological underpinning and its contemporary application.



Questions for reflection

Questions that can be used for group discussion or personal reflection.



Ideas for action

Some ideas or an exercise to help people think through the application of the principle to their own situation.

We have tried to make this book work:

- whether it is read by an individual or used as the basis for group discussion.
- whether you want to work through it systematically or turn to particular topics as they arise in your working life.

PART ONE

GOSPEL WORK



1

GOD WORKS

Principle

Expect work to be fun, fulfilling and exciting.



Consider this

Mark looked up at the clock. 4.55. Five minutes to go. Surely it wouldn't matter if they closed a minute or two early tonight. He looked at the pile of shoe boxes in the corner. They could wait till the morning. A few of the racks needed straightening. But they would only get untidy again. No, he was done for the day. He turned over the sign in the window—"closed"—and grabbed his coat.

Mandy looked up at the clock. 4.55. Five minutes to go. Another call came through. "Hello, how can I help you?" she said in her polite voice. Meanwhile she rolled her eyes at Christine and acted a yawn. "I'm afraid that's the best I can do", she said a few moments later. Then, once the call was over, she added for Christine's benefit, "... at 5pm after a long day".

By 7.20 Mark and Mandy were sitting in John's living room waiting for the rest of the house group to arrive. "How was work today?" John asked. They both sighed. "Same as always," grumbled Mandy. "It pays the bills", said Mark, before launching into a story about an annoying customer. John sat there listening, and wondered whether he should say anything about their attitude...



Biblical background

Read Genesis 1 v 1 – 2 v 2

- ❓ What similarities are there between God's work and our work?
- ❓ How does God view His work and His workmanship?
- ❓ What roles does God give to humanity?



Read all about it

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. **Genesis 1 v 31 – 2 v 2**

God is a worker. He works and He rests from His work. And He still works. Jesus says: “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working” (John 5 v 17). God is a worker and Jesus is a worker (John 4 v 34 and 17 v 4).

And notice that God takes delight in His work. He looks at what He has done and says: “It is good”. The writer of Proverbs describes the role of Wisdom in creation, and the New Testament sees this as a picture of Jesus. Proverbs says: “Then I was constantly at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind” (Proverbs 8 v 30-31). Jesus was at the Father's side, crafting creation. And He

takes delight in His work. Day after day He is filled with delight, rejoicing in God's workmanship.

Not only is God a worker, but He made humanity to share His work:

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. 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" ... The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. **Genesis 1 v 27-28; 2 v 15**

We are made in the image of God, and one of the things this means is ruling over creation as God's stewards.

On the first three days of creation God "separates". He separates light and dark, water and sky, sea and land. Genesis 1 v 2 says the world was "*formless and empty*". In the first three days God orders or governs the chaos. Then on days four, five and six He fills the emptiness. He fills the sky with the sun, moon and stars. He fills the sky and seas with birds and fish. He fills the land with animals. Then God gives humanity the twin tasks of filling and governing the earth—the very things that He Himself was doing in creation. On each of the first three days of creation God "names" things. He names the "day" and "night", the "sky", the "land" and the "sea". But He does no naming on days four, five and six. Instead He gives humanity the task of naming the animals and birds (Genesis 2 v 19).

God created the world as a good, but unfinished project. Now He hands over His creation project to us. He calls on us to fill and subdue the world. This is often called "**the cultural mandate**". God gives us a mandate to create, invent, explore, discover, develop, produce, buy and sell. God has graciously invited us to participate with Him in the task of producing a beautiful world that brings Him glory.

Being made in God's image also means being relational, just as

God is relational. And through work we not only glorify God, we also provide for our families and contribute to our communities (Deuteronomy 14 v 28-29; Ephesians 4 v 28).

So work is commended in the Bible as a good thing. Work is not a necessary evil we have to endure. It is both a privilege and a blessing. This is why we find satisfaction and fulfilment in work. To work is to be part of what it means to be human. We find pleasure in a job well done. We delight in a product well made or a service well performed—something that works, something that is beautiful, something that will endure. It's a pleasure that we can all find in our work: the clean floor, the student who grasps an idea, the empty in-tray and the satisfied customer. That pleasure is an echo of the pleasure of God when He saw that all He had made was very good. When we find delight in a job well done, that delight is an echo of the delight that the Wisdom of God found in crafting the world.



Questions for reflection

- ? When a craftsman runs his hand over a finished piece of wood, he shares the joy of the Creator at the creation of the world. The satisfied customer. The productive workforce. The balanced books. The clean kitchen. The delivery made on time. The finished design.
- *How do you share the joy of the Creator?*
- ? A common attitude in the modern world is that only the knowledge-based work of people like managers, teachers and designers is meaningful and fulfilling. We don't value the work of labourers and factory workers, or workers in the service sector like cleaners and waiters. Manual or mundane work is seen as undignified. Do you recognise this attitude in others? Has this attitude found a place in your own thinking?
- *How does a biblical worldview challenge this thinking?*
- ? If you're a boss or in management, how can you make work satisfying and dignified for others? Health and safety legislation protects the bodies of workers, but we also need to care for the "humanness" of workers.
- *How can you ensure work is not demeaning?*
 - *Are there ways in which you could make it interesting and fulfilling?*
 - *How can you honour those who work with you appropriately?*