

GOSPEL SHAPED

WORK

Leader's Guide



GOSPEL SHAPED WORK

Tom Nelson



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Gospel Shaped Work Leader's Guide

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CONTENTS

SERIES PREFACE	7
INTRODUCTION	9
MAKING THE MOST OF GOSPEL SHAPED CHURCH	13
HOW TO USE GOSPEL SHAPED WORK	21
DOWNLOADS	30
SESSIONS	
SESSION 1: CREATED TO WORK	33
SESSION 2: WORK AND THE FALL	51
SESSION 3: RENEWED WORK	69
SESSION 4: GLORIFYING GOD THROUGH WORK	87
SESSION 5: THE GOSPEL AND YOUR WORK	105
SESSION 6: WORK AND POWER	125
SESSION 7: WORK AND THE COMMON GOOD (OPTIONAL)	143
SESSION 8: WHAT WE ARE WORKING TOWARD	161
THE COMPLETE SERIES	185





PREFACE

GROWING A GOSPEL SHAPED CHURCH

The Gospel Coalition is a group of pastors and churches in the Reformed heritage who delight in the truth and power of the gospel, and who want the gospel of Christ crucified and resurrected to lie at the center of all we cherish, preach and teach.

We want churches called into existence by the gospel to be shaped by the gospel in their everyday life.

Through our fellowship, conferences, and online and printed media, we have sought to encourage pastors and church leaders to calibrate their lives around what is of first importance—the gospel of Christ. In these resources, we want to provide those same pastors with the tools to excite and equip church members with this mindset.

In our foundation documents, we identified five areas that should mark the lives of believers in a local fellowship:

1. Empowered corporate worship
2. Evangelistic effectiveness
3. Counter-cultural community
4. The integration of faith and work
5. The doing of justice and mercy

We believe that a church utterly committed to winsome and theologically substantial expository preaching, and that lives out the gospel in these areas, will display its commitment to dynamic evangelism, apologetics, and church planting. These gospel-shaped churches will emphasize repentance, personal renewal, holiness, and the wonderful life of the church as the body of Christ. At the same time, there will be engagement with the social structures of ordinary people, and cultural engagement with art, business, scholarship and government. The church will be characterized by firm devotion to the truth on the one hand, and by transparent compassion on the other.



The Gospel Coalition believes in the priority of the local church, and that the local church is the best place to discuss these five ministry drivers and decide how to integrate them into life and mission. So, while being clear on the biblical principles, these resources give space to consider what a genuine expression of a gospel-shaped church looks like for you in the place where God has put you, and with the people he has gathered into fellowship with you.

Through formal teaching sessions, daily Bible devotionals, group Bible studies and the regular preaching ministry, it is our hope and prayer that congregations will grow into maturity, and so honor and glorify our great God and Savior.



Don Carson
President



Tim Keller
Vice President



INTRODUCTION

As gospel-loving people, we say that the gospel influences every dimension of our lives; yet many of us struggle with living out a gospel-shaped faith, particularly when it comes to our work. It is easy and convenient to compartmentalize our lives, worshiping one way on Sunday and working in quite another way on Monday. Are your Sunday faith and your Monday work seemingly worlds apart? Is your Christian faith speaking into what you do in the majority of your life? Are you experiencing a sizeable Sunday to Monday gap? I have good news. God's design and desire for you is to embrace a gospel-shaped faith that closes the gap between your Sunday worship and your Monday work.

The Gospel Coalition is addressing the importance of narrowing the all too common Sunday to Monday gap in their Theological Vision for Ministry, entitled, *The Integration of Faith and Work*:

Christians glorify God not only through the ministry of the Word, but also through their vocations of agriculture, art, business, government, scholarship—all for God's glory and the furtherance of the public good. Too many Christians have learned to seal off their faith-beliefs from the way they work in their vocation. The gospel is seen as a means of finding individual peace and not as the foundation of a worldview—a comprehensive interpretation of reality affecting all that we do. But we have a vision for a church that equips its people to think out the implications of the gospel on how we do carpentry, plumbing, data-entry, nursing, art, business, government, journalism, entertainment, and scholarship. Such a church will not only support Christians' engagement with culture, but will also help them work with distinctiveness, excellence, and accountability in their trades and professions...¹

In this curricular journey of exploration, we will address both theologically and practically the Sunday to Monday gap. We desire to guide you to greater understanding of how a more integral Christian faith shapes you as a worker, informs the work you do and influences the workplace you inhabit. In each session you will encounter life-changing truths flowing from Holy Scripture regarding the

¹ You can read the full text of the statement on page 176 of the Handbook.

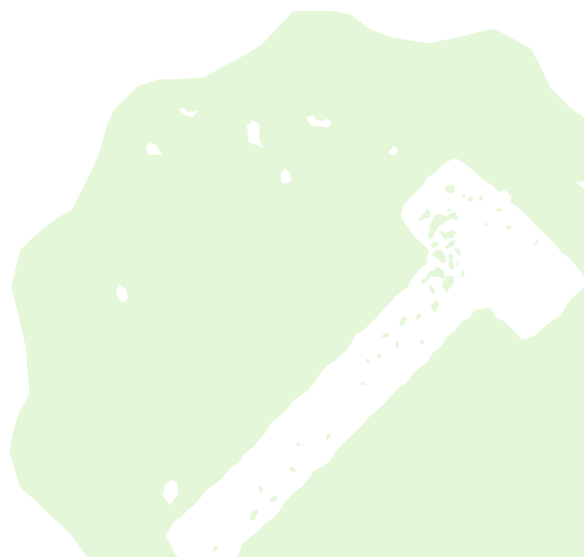


paid or unpaid work you are called to do throughout the week. You will become aware in fresh and transforming ways of how you have been created and redeemed with work in mind. Your mind will be challenged and your heart encouraged with a hopeful realism, remembering that the work you do now in this time of redemptive history is both energizing and agonizing, both fulfilling and frustrating. You can anticipate a renewed sense of joy from knowing more fully the biblical truth that one day yet future, you will work without the thorns and thistles that are now an inescapable part of the brokenness of all work. In the mysterious providence of God, you will discover it is in and through the joys and pains of your work that you are called to worship God, be spiritually formed, love your neighbors, live out the gospel and proclaim the gospel to others.

It is my heartfelt and hopeful prayer that as you work through this curriculum, you will increasingly realize how much the gospel speaks into the work you are called to do each and every day. May you gain a greater glimpse of how very much your work matters to God and to others, and may the inspired words of the apostle Paul grace your journey of discovery! "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ" (Colossians 3:23-24).



Tom Nelson





**MAKING THE MOST OF
GOSPEL SHAPED
CHURCH**





WHAT GOSPEL SHAPED CHURCH WILL DO FOR YOU

God is in the business of changing people and changing churches. He always does that through his gospel.

Through the gospel he changed us from his enemies to his friends, and through the gospel he brought us into a new family to care for each other and to do his will in the world. The gospel brings life and creates churches.

But the gospel of Jesus, God's Son, our Savior and Lord, isn't merely what begins our Christian life and forms new churches. It is the pattern, and provides the impetus, for all that follows. So Paul wrote to the Colossian church:

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving (Colossians 2:6-7).

"As you received ... so walk..." In other words, the secret of growing as a Christian is to continue to reflect upon and build your life on the gospel of the lordship of Jesus Christ. And the secret of growing as a church is to let the gospel inform and energize every single aspect of a church's life, both in what you do and how you do it, from your sermons to young mothers' groups; from your budget decisions and your pastoral care to your buildings maintenance and church bulletins.

Letting the gospel shape a church requires the whole church to be shaped by the gospel. To be, and become, gospel shaped is not a task merely for the senior pastor, or the staff team, or the board of elders. It is something that happens as every member considers the way in which the gospel should continue to shape their walk, and the life of their church.



That is the conviction that lies behind this series of five resources from The Gospel Coalition. It will invite your church members to be part of the way in which you shape your church according to the unchanging gospel, in your particular culture and circumstances. It will excite and equip your whole church to be gospel shaped. It will envision you together, from senior church staff to your newest believer. It will enable you all to own the vision of a gospel-shaped church, striving to teach that gospel to one another and to reach your community with that gospel. As you continue to work out together the implications of the gospel that has saved us, you will be guided into Christian maturity in every area of your lives, both personal and corporate.

This resource is for all kinds of churches: large and small; urban and rural; new plants and long-established congregations; all denominations and none. It is for any congregation that has been given life by the gospel and wants to put the gospel at the center of its life.

You can use the five tracks in any order you like—and you can use as many or as few of them as you wish. If you think your church is lacking in one particular area, it will always be helpful to focus on that for a season. But it is our hope that you will plan to run all five parts of the curriculum with your church—perhaps over a 3- or 4-year time frame. Some tracks may be more like revision and confirmation that you are working well in those areas. Others will open up new areas of service and change that you need to reflect upon. But together they will help you grow into an organic maturity as you reflect on the implications of the gospel in every area of life.



HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS CURRICULUM

Because the gospel, as it is articulated in the pages of the Bible, should be the foundation of everything we do, this resource is designed to work best if a congregation gives itself over to exploring the themes together as a whole. That means shaping the whole of church life for a season around the theme. The overall aim is to get the DNA of the gospel into the DNA of your church life, structures, practices and people.

So it is vitally important that you involve as many people in your congregation as possible in the process, so that there is a sense that this is a journey that the whole church has embarked upon together. The more you immerse yourselves in this material, the more you will get from it. But equally, all churches are different, and so this material is flexible enough to fit any and every church program and structure—see page 24 for more details.

Here are some other suggestions for how to make the most of this material.

PREPARE

Work through the material in outline with your leadership team and decide which elements best fit where. Will you use the sermon suggestions, or develop a series of your own? Will you teach through the main sessions in Sunday School, or in midweek groups? Will you use the teaching DVD, or give your own talks?

Think about some of the likely pressure points this discussion will create in your congregation. How will you handle in a constructive way any differences of opinion that come out of this? Decide together how you will handle feedback. There will be many opportunities for congregation members to express their ideas and thoughts, and as you invite them to think about your church's life, they will have many suggestions. It will be overwhelming to have everyone emailing or calling the Senior Pastor; but it will be very frustrating if church members feel they are not truly being listened to, and that nothing will really change. So organize a



system of feedback from group-discussion leaders and Bible-study leaders; make clear which member of senior staff will collect that feedback; and schedule time as a staff team to listen to your members' thoughts, and pray about and consider them.

There is an online feedback form that could be distributed and used to round off the whole track with your congregation.

PROMOTE

Encourage your congregation to buy into the process by promoting it regularly and building anticipation. Show the trailer at all your church meetings and distribute your own customized version of the bulletin insert (download from www.gospelshapedchurch.org).

Embarking on this course together should be a big deal. Make sure your congregation knows what it might mean for them, and what an opportunity it represents in the life of your whole church; and make sure it sounds like an exciting adventure in faith.

Do involve the whole church. Younger children may not be able to grasp the implications of some things, but certainly those who teach and encourage children of 11 and upwards will be able to adapt the material and outlines here to something that is age appropriate.

PRAY

Pray as a leadership team that the Lord would lead you all into new, exciting ways of serving him.

Encourage the congregation to pray. There are plenty of prompts in the material for this to happen, but do pray at your regular meetings for the Lord's help and guidance as you study, think and discuss together. Building in regular prayer times will help your congregation move together as a fellowship. Prayer connects us to God, but it also connects us to each other, as we address our Father together. And our God "is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20) as his people ask him to enable them to grasp, and be shaped by, the love of Christ that is shown to us in his gospel.



FOUR WAYS TO MAKE (OR BREAK) THIS PROCESS

1. BE OPEN TO CHANGE AS A CHURCH

As churches that love the gospel, we should always be reforming to live more and more in line with that gospel. Change isn't always easy, and is often sacrificial; but it is exciting, and part of the way in which we obey our Lord. Approach this exploration of *Gospel Shaped Work* by encouraging your church to be willing to change where needed.

2. BE OPEN TO CHANGE YOURSELF

This curriculum will lead every member to think hard about how the gospel should shape, and in some ways re-shape, your church. You are giving them permission to suggest making changes. As a leader, giving such permission is both exciting and intimidating. It will *make* your course if you enter it as a leadership excited to see how your church may change and how you may be challenged. It will *break* it if you approach it hoping or expecting that your members will simply agree in every way with what you have already decided.

3. DISCUSS GRACIOUSLY

Keep talking about grace and community. Church is about serving others and giving up "my" own wants, not about meeting "my" own social preferences and musical tastes. Encourage your membership to pursue discussions that are positive, open and non-judgmental, and to be able to disagree lovingly and consider others' feelings before their own, rather than seeking always to "win." Model gospel grace in the way you talk about the gospel of grace.

4. REMEMBER WHO IS IN CHARGE

Jesus Christ is Lord of your church—not the leadership, the elders or the membership. So this whole process needs to be bathed in a prayerful sense of commitment to follow him, and to depend on his strength and guidance for any change his Spirit is prompting. Keep reminding your church that this process is not about becoming the church they want, but the one your Lord wants.



HOW TO USE
GOSPEL SHAPED
WORK





HOW TO USE GOSPEL SHAPED WORK

Gospel Shaped Work is designed to be a flexible resource to fit a wide variety of church settings. The **Main Teaching Session** is the core of the curriculum—the other components grow out of this. The more elements you use, the greater the benefit will be to your church.

The elements of this course are:

- **MAIN TEACHING SESSION** with DVD or talk, and discussion (core)
- **PERSONAL DEVOTIONALS** (recommended)
- **GROUP BIBLE STUDY** (recommended)
- **PERSONAL JOURNAL** (optional)
- **SERMON SERIES** (suggested passages given)

Each church member will need a copy of the *Gospel Shaped Work Handbook*. This contains everything they need to take part in the course, including the discussion questions for the **Main Teaching Session**, **Personal Devotionals**, and the **Group Bible Study**. There's also space to make notes during the sermon, and a **Personal Journal** to keep a record of the things they have been learning.

Each person who will be leading a group discussion, either in the **Main Teaching Session** or the **Group Bible Study**, will need a copy of the *Gospel Shaped Work Leader's Guide*. This includes leader's notes to help them guide a small group through the discussion or Bible-study questions, and other resources to give more background and detail. In the Leader's Guide, all the instructions, questions, comments, prayer points etc. that also appear in the Handbook are in **bold text**.



Further copies of the *Handbook* and *Leader's Guide* are available from
WWW.GOSPELSHAPEDCHURCH.ORG/WORK

A FLEXIBLE CURRICULUM

Gospel Shaped Work is designed to be a flexible resource. You may be able to give your whole church over to working through it. If so, a typical week might look like this:

SUNDAY

- Adult Sunday school: **Main Teaching Session** using DVD or live talk (talk outline given in *Leader's Guide*)
- Morning service: **Sermon** based on main theme (suggested Bible passages given in the *Leader's Guide*)

MIDWEEK

- Small groups work through the **Group Bible Study**

CHURCH MEMBERS

- Use the **Personal Devotionals** from Monday to Saturday
- Use the **Personal Journal** to record their thoughts, questions and ideas about things they've been learning throughout the week

Or, if you choose to use the curriculum on a midweek basis, it may be like this:

MIDWEEK

- Small groups work through the **Main Teaching Session** using the DVD

CHURCH MEMBERS

- Use the **Personal Devotionals** from Monday to Saturday
- Use the **Personal Journal** to record their thoughts, questions and ideas about things they've been learning throughout the week

Or you can use the components in any other way that suits your church practice.

HOW TO USE EACH ELEMENT

These sample pages from the *Gospel Shaped Work Handbook* show the different elements of the curriculum.

All of the material in this curriculum quotes from and is based on the ESV Bible.



MAIN TEACHING SESSION

- 60 minutes
- Choose between DVD or live talk
- Discussion questions to help group members discuss the DVD/talk and apply it to their own lives and their church
- Guidance for answering the questions is given in the **Leader's Guide**
- Suggestions for praying together

This is the core of the curriculum. It can be run using the *Gospel Shaped Work DVD*, or by giving a live talk. A summary of the talk is included in the **Leader's Guide** (see page 34 for an example). A full editable script can also be downloaded from www.gospelshapedchurch.org/work/talks.

In each session, the DVD/talk is split into either two or three sections, each followed by some discussion questions. At the end of the session there are suggestions to help the group pray specifically for each other.

The discussion questions are designed to help church members unpack the teaching they have heard and apply it to their own lives and to the church as a whole. There are not necessarily right and wrong answers to some of the questions, as this will often depend on the context of your own church. Let group members discuss these openly, and apply them to their own situation.

Keep the discussion groups the same each week if possible, with the same leader (who will need a copy of this **Leader's Guide**) for each group, so that relationships are deepened and the discussions can build on those of previous sessions.



PERSONAL DEVOTIONALS

- Six devotionals with each session
- Designed to be started the day after the main teaching session
- Linked with the theme for each teaching session, but based on different Bible passages
- Help church members dig more deeply into the theme on a daily basis

Each session is followed by six personal devotionals that build on the main theme. They are ideal for church members to use between sessions. For example, if you have the main teaching session on a Sunday, church members can then use the devotionals from Monday to Saturday.

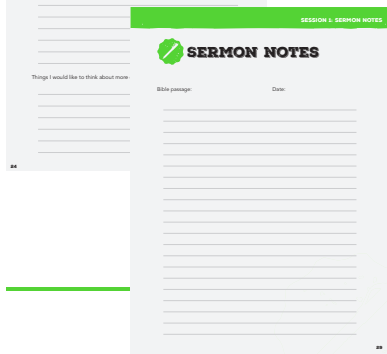
These short devotionals can be used in addition to any regular personal Bible study being done by church members. They would also form a useful introduction for anyone trying out personal Bible reading for the first time.

As well as being in the group member's **Handbook**, the personal devotionals are available for a small fee on the Explore Bible Devotional app. This can be downloaded from the iTunes App Store or Google Play (search for "Explore Bible Devotional"). Select "Gospel Shaped Work" from the app's download menu.



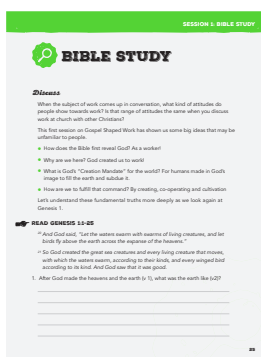
PERSONAL JOURNAL

- A useful place for church members to note down what they have been learning throughout the week, and any questions they may have



SERMON NOTES

- If the Sunday sermon series is running as part of **Gospel Shaped Work**, this is a helpful place to make notes



GROUP BIBLE STUDY

- 40 – 50 minutes
- An ideal way for small groups to build on what they have been learning in the main teaching
- Uses a different Bible passage from the DVD/talk
- Suggested answers to the questions are given in the **Leader's Guide**

This study is ideal for a home group or other group to work through together. It builds on the theme covered by the main teaching session, but is based on a different Bible passage. You can see the passages and themes listed in the grid on pages 28-29.

If possible, give 40 – 50 minutes for the Bible study. However, it can be covered in 30 minutes if necessary, and if you keep a close eye on time. If your church is not using the Bible studies as part of a regular group, they would also be suitable for individuals to do on their own or in a pair if they want to do some further study on the themes being looked at in the course.

SERMON SUGGESTIONS

The **Leader's Guide** gives a choice of three sermon suggestions to tie in with each session:

- A passage that is used in the main teaching session (DVD or live talk)
- The Bible reading that is being studied in the Group Bible Study that week
- A third passage that is not being used elsewhere, but that picks up on the same themes. This is the passage that is listed in the overview grid on pages 28-29.

FURTHER READING

At the end of each session in the **Leader's Guide** you will find a page of suggestions for further reading. This gives ideas for books, articles, blog posts, videos, etc. that relate to the session, together with some quotes that you might use in sermons, discussion groups and conversations. Some of these may be helpful in your preparation, as well as helping any group members who want to think more deeply about the topic they've been discussing.

CURRICULUM OUTLINE AT A GLANCE

SESSION	MAIN TEACHING (DVD/TALK)	PERSONAL DEVOTIONS	GROUP BIBLE STUDY	SERMON*
1 Created to work	We were created to work, and that is wonderful news. Based on Genesis 1 and 2 .	Looking at Psalm 8 , a hymn that helps us enjoy the truths of Genesis 1 and 2.	Genesis 1:1-31 Helping group members think more deeply about our fundamental attitude toward ourselves and our work.	PSALM 104
2 Work and the fall	How to be realistic about the frustration and struggle of our work without being without hope. Based on Genesis 3 .	Walking through several episodes from Genesis 4 to 24 , showing the effects of sin on our working lives.	Luke 12:13-34 Looking at a parable of Jesus that exposes some of our false thinking post-fall, and that has the gospel firmly at its center.	GEN 11:1-9
3 Renewed work	Not only will all of God's people be redeemed; all of God's creation will too. This impacts how we view our work. Various passages including Romans 5 and 8 .	Looking at Romans 1 – 3 , taking us to the heart of why we need redemption and how God provides it at the cross.	Exodus 31:1-11 God gives his people his Spirit in order that together they may do the work he calls them to do.	JAMES 1:2-12
4 Glorifying God through work	Discipleship is for the whole of life, including our work. Based on Matthew 11:28-30 .	Studying Paul's words in Colossians 4:2-6 , looking at how we can live for Christ and speak as his witnesses in our workplaces.	Colossians 3:1-17 Looking at some of the changes in attitude and lifestyle that come with belonging to Christ.	LUKE 3:1-17

SESSION	MAIN TEACHING (DVD/TALK)	PERSONAL DEVOTIONS	GROUP BIBLE STUDY	SERMON*
5 The gospel and your work	Based on Philemon , to see what a first-century relationship between a master and his slave can teach us about work today.	Looking at 1 Peter 2:11-25 , to see how to live in a way that is honorable and causes others to glorify God.	Colossians 3:22 – 4:1 How Christ transforms our view of work.	EPH 6:5-9
6 Work and power	We all have “vocational power” to influence others and spread <i>shalom</i> in the world. Based on Jeremiah 29:4-14 .	Looking at the life in Babylonian exile of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in Daniel 1 – 7 .	Mark 10:32-45 Looking at Jesus’ teaching on how Christians are to use their power and authority.	PROVERBS 31
7 Work and the common good (optional**)	Exploring ideas about economics in the world. Various passages in both Old and New Testaments.	How the gospel transforms our view on and use of money. Luke 19:1-10 (Zacchaeus) and 1 Timothy 6:6-19 .	James 4:13 – 5:6 How we choose to spend our time and money.	2 COR 8 - 9
8 What we are working toward	In the new creation work will continue, and work will be better. Based on Revelation 21 – 22 and Isaiah 65 .	Looking at Proverbs , highlighting what godly wisdom looks like in our day-to-day work.	Psalms 8; Hebrews 2:5-9 Exploring further that eternity in the new creation is both physical and involves work.	2 TIM 2:8-13

* **Sermon:** The *Leader’s Guide* gives three or four sermon suggestions to tie in with each session. Usually, the first picks up a passage from the Main Teaching Session; the second uses the passage from the Group Bible Study; and the third is a new passage, linked with the theme but not used elsewhere in the session. This third passage is the one listed here.

** **Session 7:** This session on economics is optional. Depending on experience, some groups may find that it is too complex; others that it is too basic. Choose whether to include it or not based on the make-up of your particular group.



DOWNLOADS

In addition to the material in this *Leader's Guide*, there are a number of extra downloadable resources and enhancements. You will find all of them listed under the Work track at www.gospelshapedchurch.org and on The Good Book Company's website: www.thegoodbook.com/gsc.

- **DIGITAL DOWNLOAD OF DVD MATERIAL.** If you have already bought a DVD as part of the *Leader's Kit*, you will have access to a single HD download of the material using the code on the download card. If you want to download additional digital copies, in SD or HD, these can be purchased from The Good Book Company website: www.thegoodbook.com/gsc.
- **DVD TRAILERS.** Trailers and promotional pieces for the series as a whole and for the individual tracks can be downloaded for free. Use these trailers to excite your church about being involved in *Gospel Shaped Church*.
- **TALK TRANSCRIPTS.** We're conscious that for some churches and situations, it may be better to deliver your own talk for the main session so that it can be tailored specifically to your people and context. You can download the talk transcript as both a PDF and as an editable Word document.
- **FEEDBACK FORMS.** Because *Gospel Shaped Church* is designed as a whole-church exploration, it's important that you think through carefully how you will handle suggestions and feedback. There's some guidance for that on pages 17-18. We've provided a downloadable feedback form that you can use as part of the way in which you end your time using the resource. Simply print it and distribute it to your church membership to gather their thoughts and ideas, and to get a sense of the issues you may want to focus on for the future. In addition, there are also fully editable versions of this feedback form so that you can create your own customized sheet that works effectively for the way in which you have used this material, and which suits your church membership. Alternatively, you could use the questions to create your own online feedback form with Google Forms or some other software, to make collecting and collating information easier.

- **RESOURCE LIST.** For each session in this *Leader's Guide* we have included a list of resources that will help you in your preparation for sermons, discussions, Bible studies and other conversations. On the *Gospel Shaped Church* website, you will find an up-to-date list of resources, plus a shorter downloadable list that you might consider giving to church members to supplement their own reading and thinking.
- **BULLETIN TEMPLATES.** Enclosed with the *Leader's Kit* is a sample of a bulletin-insert design to promote the Work track to your church. You can download a printable PDF of the design from the *Gospel Shaped Church* website to add your own details, and to print and distribute to your congregation.
- **OTHER PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL.** Editable powerpoint slides and other promotional material to use.



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SESSION 1: **CREATED TO WORK**

WHY ARE WE HERE? THAT IS OFTEN A SURPRISINGLY DIFFICULT QUESTION TO ANSWER – AND NOT MANY OF US WOULD INCLUDE THE WORD “WORK” IN OUR RESPONSE. IN THIS SESSION, YOU’LL LEARN THAT ONE OF THE PURPOSES FOR WHICH WE WERE CREATED IS, IN FACT, TO WORK – AND WHY THAT IS WONDERFUL NEWS.



TALK OUTLINE

1.1 • Most Christians know the answer to the question “Why did Jesus come?” But many of us struggle with the question: “Why are we here?” We must look at Genesis 1–2.

1.2 • **MADE TO WORK** *Genesis 1 – 2*

- Why did God make humanity? We are all created to work (1:27-28).
- We are made in God’s image—and God is himself a worker.
- The five commands in 1:28 give us a definition of work in three areas...

• **WORK AS CREATION** *Genesis 2:15*

- A central aspect of our creative work is making and raising families (1:28). Raising children is therefore of great significance.
- God tells Adam and Eve to take the garden and expand it into all of creation. Work is creation—the expansion of human flourishing into all of God’s creation.

• **WORK AS COLLABORATION**

- **Collaboration with God**, when we work at things which reflect his true nature.
- **Collaboration with others**: Adam needed a co-worker (2:18). Co-operation with others is central to our work.

• **WORK AS CULTIVATION**

To “subdue” and “have dominion” mean that Adam is to harness and **cultivate** the garden’s potential. We are to be good **stewards** of the assets God has put under our charge, rearranging God’s raw materials so that it helps people to thrive.

1.3 • **WORK UNDER GOD**

This view of work has three implications:

- There is no such thing as “menial” labor.
- All humans bear God’s image when they work—we should honor all workers.
- Your work participates in God’s mission.

- **CONCLUSION**: We were made to be workers; and work is fundamentally good.



You can download a full transcript of these talks at

WWW.GOSPELSHAPEDCHURCH.ORG/WORK/TALKS



CREATED TO WORK

- * Ask the group members to turn to Session 1 on page 13 of the Handbook.

Discuss

If you went out on the street and asked people the question “Why are we here?” what answers do you think you might get?

This starter question is to get people thinking and talking about the subject they will meet at the beginning of the DVD: “Why are we here?” There are no wrong answers—it’s just a brief, relaxed chat to help break the ice and introduce the theme of the session.

 **WATCH DVD 1.1 (3 min 49 sec) OR DELIVER TALK 1.1 (see page 34)**

- * Encourage the group to make notes as they watch the DVD or listen to the talk. There is space for notes on page 15 of the Handbook.

Discuss



READ GENESIS 1:26 – 2:3

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

*²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.*

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on



the earth.”²⁹ And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.”³⁰ And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

2 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

In Genesis 1:28, God tells the first people how they are to live. What are the five commands he gives them, and what do they mean?

- *Be fruitful*—primarily to have children, but it implies much more.
- *Multiply*—those children have more children who have more children, and so on, so that the number of people grows.
- *Fill the earth*—spread out so that humans are living all over the earth.
- *Subdue it*—work the earth so that it is fruitful.
- *Have dominion*—rule over the earth.

These ideas will be unpacked later in the session. For now, this question is aiming to ensure that the group understand the basic meaning of each command.

How does this help to answer our opening question: “Why are we here?”

In verse 28, God tells Adam and Eve that they have plenty to do! They are not in the garden just to sit back and relax. They, and their descendants after them, are to work. So right at the beginning of the Bible, God is giving one answer to the question “Why are we here?” We are here to work.

Genesis 2:3 tells us that God is a worker. We can also discern one of the reasons why he works—he loves his creation and wants to bless it. He created us in his image (Genesis 1:27), so all humans—as his image bearers—are created to be workers too. Does the idea that you were made to be a worker surprise you? What difference might this truth make on your journey to work, or as you start your day?

Even though this curriculum is on the topic of work, it's likely that some in your group will be surprised to discover that we have all been made to work, especially if their view of work tends to be negative. But God created us to work in Genesis 1—before sin impacted every part of life (in Genesis 3)—so that means that work *is fundamentally good*.

Ask the group whether this view of work as a fundamentally good thing might make a difference to their daily experience. For some it won't. For others, it may lead to a shift in attitude.

NOTE: If group members raise the issue of work being hard, painful, and maybe unfair, explain that we will be thinking about the painful side of work in Session 2.

 **WATCH DVD 1.2 (10 min 52 sec) OR DELIVER TALK 1.2 (see page 34)**

- ★ Encourage the group to make notes as they watch the DVD or listen to the talk. There is space for notes on page 17 of the Handbook.

Discuss

In this curriculum, we will see that work is more than just what we do each day, or how we pay our way. Work is creation, collaboration and cultivation—whatever our daily occupation, paid or not.

Look at your work (paid or otherwise) through the lens of “work as creation.” How does your specific work help to build, create, strengthen or expand human society?

Some group members will find this easy to answer, but others may struggle. If someone finds it hard to recognize any aspect of their own work that “builds, creates, strengthens or expands human society,” ask the other members of the

group for ideas. Often, someone else can see positives that an individual may miss. Possible answers could include: cleaners making our buildings nicer and safer for human society to flourish in; teachers helping children grow in wisdom and knowledge that will serve human society; retired people caring for their neighbors to strengthen human society in their community; homemakers caring for and teaching children; builders creating new homes for people to flourish in; ministers helping God's church to grow.

Work is primarily cultivation—contributing something to the world. But it is also collaboration in two ways: collaboration with God, and collaboration with each other. Can you see how the work you do (paid or otherwise) is collaboration in one or both of these ways?

In the DVD presentation, Tom Nelson said: *"Our work is a collaboration with God's rule when we work at things that reflect his true nature—his justice, righteousness, peace and beauty."* So we are collaborating with God whenever we serve on a jury to support justice in our society; stand up for honesty and fairness in our workplace; help battling neighbors to find a peaceful solution to their dispute; or create a beautiful garden for others to enjoy.

Our work will be collaboration with others when we work alongside others to build, create, strengthen or expand human society.

Work as cultivation means that we are to grow and steward the raw materials of creation. How does your work take the "raw materials" of God's creation to enhance the lives of others?

(Clarify to your group that the "raw materials" could include physical material, or people, or non-physical material such as ideas, numbers or words.)

As with the previous questions, some group members may find it hard to see how their own work "cultivates the raw materials of creation," in which case ask the rest of the group for suggestions. It may also help to remind the group that the work we do isn't only paid employment. It may be that the work people do outside of their daily job is more clearly linked with cultivation. For example, if they volunteer in any children's or youth work, helping young people to grow and develop; if they use practical skills to help a neighbor decorate a room or mend a fence; if they keep the accounts for a local charity, or write articles for a local newsletter.

▶ WATCH DVD 1.3 (4 min 14 sec) OR DELIVER TALK 1.3 (see page 34)

- * Encourage the group to make notes as they watch the DVD or listen to the talk. There is space for notes on page 18 of the Handbook.

Discuss

“There is no such thing as menial labor.” How does this change the way you think about dull tasks you undertake during the day, and/or about people who do the kinds of jobs your society considers “menial”?

Some in your group may have been challenged about how they see their own work, or how they view people in certain jobs. For others, this session may have confirmed their existing view of work as good, no matter how “menial” it may appear.

As we think about work over the next few weeks, what questions about work are you hoping will be answered?

You may want to keep a note of the questions your group comes up with—don’t feel you have to answer them right away, since many will be addressed during the next seven sessions, or in the personal daily devotionals or weekly Bible study. It may help to check the list occasionally to see which questions have not yet been answered, and decide whether to build some of them into future group discussions.

Pray

Genesis 1 says that we are created to work and that work is fundamentally good.

Pray that during the course of this curriculum, God will show you any attitudes to work that need to change.

Pray that you will grow as godly workers, who are images of God to the world around you.



DAILY BIBLE DEVOTIONALS

As you finish the session, point group members to the daily devotionals to do at home over the course of the next week. There are six, beginning on page XX, and followed by a page for journaling. This week they work through Psalm 8, a hymn helping us enjoy the truths of Genesis 1–2—who God is and how creation points us to him; and who we are as humans, and what our role in creation is.



SERMONS



OPTION ONE: GENESIS 1:26-31; 2:10-15

Tom bases his DVD presentation on the first two chapters of Genesis, and the Bible study then walks through these chapters in more detail; and you could expand upon it (or sections of it) in a longer sermon.



OPTION TWO: PSALM 104

This passage is not mentioned in this material, but picks up on several of the themes of this session, especially the following:

- God is a worker, who works wisely in (v 24), and rejoices over, all his work (v 31).
- God works both powerfully (v 5-13) and intimately (v 14-22).
- Man works within the creation as God works to sustain his creation (v 23).



OPTION THREE: GALATIANS 5:22

This preaching option is for a series on the fruit of the Spirit, considering each aspect of his fruit and how it might be lived by, and lived out, in work contexts. This week: Love.

If one of your Sunday sermons is to be based on the theme of this session, church members will find a page to write notes on the sermon on page 29 of their Handbooks.



BIBLE STUDY

AIM: The main teaching session introduced us to the idea of how the Bible sees our daily work. It had some big ideas: God is a worker; we are made in the image of God; we were created to work; and this “creation mandate” for us as workers is to create, cultivate and co-operate as we fulfill God’s command to “fill the earth and subdue it”—to extend God’s Eden perfection into the whole world. This Bible Study returns to Genesis 1 to reinforce many of these points, but also asks us to think more deeply about our fundamental attitude toward ourselves and our work. Prepare to be challenged!

Discuss

When the subject of work comes up in conversation, what kinds of attitudes do people show toward work? Is that range of attitudes the same when you discuss work at church with other Christians?

There will be a wide range of views displayed. Don’t like to think about it or talk about it! Work is a necessary evil—I live for the weekend; work is brilliant, and I love it; I find it boring and repetitive; I can bear the work because I love being with the people; work is everything to me, because it is where I get my sense of purpose from. You would hope that among Christians you might also hear phrases like: “I am really thankful for my work”; “I love the opportunity to serve others.” But perhaps not. You may also hear: “Work is a great place to evangelise others”; and “Work is a part of the fallen world.” Don’t comment on them for now; just log the answers as interesting.

This first session of *Gospel Shaped Work* has shown us some big ideas that may be unfamiliar to people.

- How does the Bible first reveal God? As a worker who loves his job!
- Why are we here? God created us to work!
- What is God’s “Creation Mandate” for the world? For humans made in God’s image to fill the earth and subdue it.
- How are we to fulfill that command? By creating, co-operating and cultivation.

Let’s understand these fundamental truths more deeply as we look again at Genesis 1.



READ GENESIS 1:1-25

²⁰ *And God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens."*

²¹ *So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.*

1. After God made the heavens and the earth (v 1), what was the earth like (v 2)?

- Without form and void.
- There was darkness.
- God was present in and over the world.

2. From v 3 onwards we see God at work. What do we learn about the kind of worker God is from these verses.

- He is a planner: his work of forming the earth is planned in stages.
- He is a builder. Each piece is put together methodically, each day of creating resting on the last.
- He takes his time! We may think six days is quick, but God could have done it in an instant. He didn't.
- He loves his work, and takes great joy and pride in it.
- He is creative in ideas—there is a rich diversity in plants and animal life.
- He creates with glorious complexity. The world is incredibly detailed.
- He rests from work, and takes the opportunity to enjoy it.

3. If you look at creation, what does it tell us about our Creator (see also Romans 1 v 19-20)?

- He is great and has awesome power.
- He created the world to be appreciated for its beauty and wonder.
- You might also say that he has a sense of humour—there are some hilarious creatures he has made with astonishing life cycles.

Additional question: If you had a powerful telescope and a microscope, what might you also understand about God?



READ GENESIS 1:26-31

²⁶ *Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."*

4. We are made "in the image of God" (v 27)—who is revealed as a worker in Genesis 1. Go through each of your answers to question 2—which of these aspects of God's character do you see in your own work? Which are you best at? Where might you need to develop?

There will be a large variety of answers to this question, but keep the conversation steered toward the positives. Underline that we are looking this week at work *as it was created by God*. If people in the group take no joy in their work at all, note this for addressing in future sessions.

5. What are the five commands God gives to the whole of humankind in verse 28? How can we see the human race fulfill these commands in general? How can you see aspects of them in the work that you do?

- *Be fruitful.* This is a general idea about work that generates life, wealth, health or wellbeing. We are commanded to be productive in all areas of our lives. In general, humans are incredible at this. We create businesses, homes, communities and countries that flourish and achieve remarkable things.
- *Multiply.* This is fruitfulness applied to having children. The human race has done extremely well at this! Make it clear here that child bearing and rearing is central to God's plan for our working lives. Home-making has a very high status in God's plans for the world.
- *Fill the earth*—spread out so that humans are living all over the earth. Again, we've been great at that.
- *Subdue it.* The call to take what is wild and unruly (see Genesis 1 v 1-2), and order it so that it is productive. This applies to turning rough land into farmland. It equally applies to an administrator or an accountant bringing order to a business, or to a household. We have been brilliant at this as a race: advanced farming, use of natural resources, and building in remote and hostile places.
- *Have dominion.* Like God, to rule over the earth. Any exercise of loving power and nurturing control is in obedience to God's creation command.



6. How should these truths about our nature and position as people in God's world affect the way we view ourselves? How might it change the way we see others?

- We are incredibly privileged. We have been given the responsibility to rule the world, and to care for and steward God's precious creation.
- This is something that *all* people have been given—irrespective of whether they call the LORD their Lord.
- We should take our responsibility to rule seriously and humbly. We should create, co-operate and cultivate with seriousness, joy and determination.
- We should recognize and value everyone because of their status.
- We should honor, encourage and applaud anyone who rules—in their family, work, community, or in government—when they fulfill their creation mandate to create and cultivate co-operatively in a way that responsibly stewards God's creation. We can and should do this, even if they are not believers, or if part of what they are doing is flawed or driven by ungodly motives.

NOTE: There may be some in your group who find this idea difficult. We have a tendency to entirely dismiss people because they have a certain belief or a particular policy or attitude. We should be able to sift the good from the bad, and give praise for what honors God, even if other things are less praiseworthy in our estimation.

7. Think about how you feel as you start work on a Monday morning. Think about common attitudes to work among your friends and colleagues. How might the perspective of Genesis 1 change our view of work—whatever that might be?

- Our work, even if it is mundane and repetitive, can and must be viewed as worship. We are serving God in it and through it. The act of making a widget, changing a diaper, answering a call, sweeping a floor, planting a seed or sending an email can be—in and of itself—an act of worship when it is serving God's call to rule, order and cultivate the world—however we are feeling!
- It may not stop a job being difficult or dull, but invests it with new meaning. We can and should praise God for the privilege of our work, and strive to do it with joy and enthusiasm.
- We should also have a relentless positivity about the work of others. Even if they do not praise God in it, we can praise God *for* it.

8. Think of some practical ways we can honor those who work around us—especially those whose work is often considered routine or “low grade.”

- We can get into the habit of thanking people for what they do, and encouraging them in it, especially those who are in jobs that are repetitive and dull by their nature.
- Engage relationally with people who serve us in shops or restaurants.
- Show an interest in what people do during the day. Stay-at-home parents; those who are retired from formal paid work but still engage in all kinds of work around the home, or as volunteers.
- Remind people of the value of their work, and why it is important. Work out some ways in which you might do this for those who may not be Christian, but which might introduce them to the idea of God’s gift to them.

Apply

FOR YOURSELF: Do you need to change your fundamental attitude toward work? Have you been guilty of a downbeat attitude toward it that does not honor God? How will you help yourself to think differently about work this week?

FOR YOUR CHURCH: Is talking about work subtly looked down on in your church, as if it is not a fit subject for conversation? How often is work referred to in a positive and constructive way in sermons, Bible studies and other church meetings? How might you cultivate a more positive way to discuss work, and work-related matters in the life of your church?

Pray

FOR YOUR GROUP: Discover what each member of your group actually does work wise. Today, try not to focus on particular problems or difficulties—we will get to that next time!. Instead, give thanks for the work, and the way it contributes to God’s creation commands.

FOR YOUR CHURCH: As your church embarks on this series examining what it means to let the gospel shape the way we think about work, pray that you would grow together in seeing more clearly the Lord Jesus Christ, and his perfect work in saving us.



FURTHER READING

The maid who sweeps her kitchen is doing the will of God just as much as the monk who prays—not because she may sing a Christian hymn as she sweeps but because God loves clean floors.

Martin Luther

Far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.

Theodore Roosevelt

There is no ordinary work. The work God has called you to do is extraordinary. Don't miss out on God's best by taking an ordinary approach to it.

Tom Nelson

Books

- *Work Matters*, chapter one (Tom Nelson)
- *Every Good Endeavor*, part one (Timothy Keller with Katherine Leary Alsdorf)
- *Work: The Meaning of Your Life* (Lester DeKoster)
- *The First Chapters of Everything* (Alasdair Paine)
- *God's Big Picture* (Vaughan Roberts)

Online

- *Do Executive Jobs Have More Kingdom Value Than Dirty Jobs?* (audio)
gospelshapedchurch.org/resources411
- *4 Reasons Why God Wills Work:* gospelshapedchurch.org/resources412
- *God the Great Janitor?* gospelshapedchurch.org/resources413
- *5 Ways to Honor Work in Church Services:*
gospelshapedchurch.org/resources414
- *Tim Keller on Why Work Matters* (video): gospelshapedchurch.org/resources415
- *Work is a Glorious Thing:* gospelshapedchurch.org/resources416
- The TGC vocations column asks practitioners about their jobs and how they integrate faith with work. See www.thegospelcoalition.org/channel/faith-and-work



LEADER'S REFLECTIONS

Lined area for writing reflections, consisting of 20 horizontal lines.





