

Created to Work

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- [0:00] Well, both of my grandfathers belonged to a generation of men who worked hard their entire lives.
- ! They were the kind of men who grew up fast, personal responsibility was not optional in their minds, they never really considered any other way. They worked from the time they were very young until they physically could not work anymore.
- And even then, they pushed themselves beyond their limits. I remember finding one of my grandfathers often army crawling through his garden because his legs had given out, but as he would tell us, the weeds still needed to be pulled.
- My favorite story comes from my other grandfather. When one of my uncles as a teenager decided to lie out in the yard to get a sun tan, he walked out, threw a shovel at him, and said, if you want a tan, you'll get it the honest way.
- Now, arguably, my dad never worked nearly as hard as my grandfathers. He didn't work outdoors on a farm or do much physical labor, but he wasn't really that far behind them in terms of work ethic.
- [1:11] He went to work right out of school. He got up early every day. And much to my disdain, he did not believe Saturdays were for lounging. They were for getting chores done around the house.
- And then comes my generation. Technically, I was born right on that line between Generation X and the Millennials. But I'm usually considered part of the latter group.
- And generally speaking, it took us a little longer to grow up than maybe my dad's generation or before. It took us a little longer to develop a sense of personal responsibility.
- Working hard wasn't necessarily, and I know I'm generalizing, but it wasn't necessarily our default position. My generation has loved to talk about flexibility and following one's passions and choosing meaningful work over other considerations like maybe salary.
- You know, we consider the kinds of things that would have caused my grandfather to throw a shovel at me and say, boy, get to work. My generation wrote books like the four-hour work week.
- [2:28] Who's familiar with that one? I actually read that book. And I'll tell you the secret to working four hours a week. First, write a book promising young men the secret to working only four hours a week.
- Second, sell a million copies or more. And third, sell as much spinoff merchandise as you possibly can before the hype wears down and people realize how unrealistic it is to support yourself working four hours a week.
- Now, I don't know whether things have gotten better or worse with younger generations. I have my suspicions. But I certainly don't want to offend any of our younger men here by applying any stereotypes that really don't fit you.

So I'll stick to my personal experience. As a teenager and even young adult, I had a very hedonistic worldview. I couldn't see the logic of working hard in school only so I could get into a good college where I would also have to work very hard, only so I could get a good job.

And then what? As I saw it, I'd have to suffer through the daily grind of a nine-to-five for the rest of my life. So I very consciously, while I was still in high school, decided that I would much rather live for the moment and do whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted to do it.

[3:54] I wanted no part of the so-called rat race. Admittedly, I didn't think things through. As it happens, it actually costs money to go out and do the things you want to do.

It's pretty hard to have a good time when you're broke and barely scraping by. And I'll tell you, after you've, true story, slept a few nights in your truck, or you've slept a few nights in the county jail because you've made a lot of very poor decisions, suddenly your father and your grandfather's lifestyles start to make a lot more sense.

And as I thought back on those days, I've come to realize there was something crucial missing in my education, and I don't blame anyone in particular. You see, I've always been taught that you're supposed to do your best in school, that you're supposed to work hard, that you're supposed to be responsible, but I really don't remember ever being told why.

I don't remember these virtues ever being grounded in Scripture for me. Now, it probably wouldn't have made a difference when I was still living in rebellion to God, but let me briefly tell you another story.

I have known some Christian men my age, more than one, who have quit their jobs, sold everything they had, and moved into their cars.

[5:20] Now, they might pick up a part-time job here or there to pay for gas and food and other basic necessities, but they mostly lounge and they drive around the country and they work just as little as possible.

They seem to enjoy the freedom that that lifestyle brings. And when I've asked why, they've often given some seemingly compelling reasons straight from the Bible.

I'm not materialistic, they'll say. There are more important things than money or stuff. This world's only temporary, and on it goes. And yet, I suspect most of us would instinctively want to push back against that way of thinking, even if we're not really sure what to say to them in response.

Why do you think that is? Well, according to Richard Phillips, in the third chapter of his book, *The Masculine Mandate*, men have a divine calling to work.

And even if we set aside the Bible and what it says, we see this calling reveal itself all over the place. What do men usually ask one another when we first meet?

[6:42] So, what do you do? I was thinking about this this week, and I actually had a gentleman ask me that question, didn't even bother to ask me my name, just wanted to know, what do you do?

We immediately assumed that men work and that their work is a pretty big part of their identity. When one of my grandfathers retired, he kept a garden that seemed to get bigger and bigger every year, despite the fact that his health got worse and worse.

My other grandfather never really retired. Even in his 80s, when one of his beef cattle nearly killed him and he was hospitalized, he made it very clear in the hospital, leave that cow where it is, I'll take care of it when I get out.

And he did, and he continued to work. When my father retired, he took up woodworking and now spends pretty much all week working.

I don't believe this is merely a byproduct of upbringing or culture. There is something built into man that drives him to work.

[7:53] Yes, like all good things, we can suppress it. Some men are notoriously lazy. But God not only calls men to work, but he created us to work.

And we see that in the creation story in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. I'll actually begin in Genesis chapter 1. You're welcome to look at it with me.

Verse 1 says, In the beginning, God created. And we need to begin there, with what God is doing, because of what Genesis later tells us about the creation of man.

So, what is God doing? He's working. Now, obviously, God's work is not exactly the same as man's work, but he is working. He's creating.

He's producing. He's subduing the very elements he creates to form the world as we know it. He's showing his dominion over creation.

[8:58] And Genesis 2 makes it even more apparent that he's working when it says in verse 2, 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.

And this is significant for two reasons. First, it shows us that work is not a punishment for sin or anything like that. Here we have a perfect God, a righteous God, working.

From the very first verse of Scripture, God is working. And second, it shows us something very relevant about God when it comes to the creation of man.

Look down at verse 26 of chapter 1. 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.

So God makes man in his image, after his likeness. This means we are like God in certain respects. He made us to reflect him. And one of the ways we reflect God is seen even in this verse.

[10:21] He creates man in his image to have dominion over all the earth. Of course, God has supreme dominion over his creation, but he gives the earth to man to steward it.

And what is a man supposed to do with it? Verse 28, Fill the earth.

Subdue it. That is, tame, or bring it under your control. Have dominion over it. God gives the earth, gives his creation to Adam to rule as a steward.

And we get further clarification in Genesis 2, verse 15, when we read, The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

The garden was already there, and it already had everything Adam needed, but he was put in charge of working it and protecting it. The word work in that verse can also be translated serve.

[11:40] He was to rule over the garden, we might say, by serving the garden. He was to take care of it. He was to do what was necessary to ensure that it thrived.

But work is a great word to use in this case because that's precisely what Adam was put in the garden to do. Presumably, he would go on to plant more because he was told to multiply and fill the earth.

He would sow, he would reap, and everything in between. In short, God created him to work.

And remember that this was before sin. Adam is still in a perfect world without sin, and yet he worked. God worked, and he entrusted man with stewarding his creation.

Even after the fall, the book of Ecclesiastes says, this is Ecclesiastes 3.13, everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil.

- [12 : 45] This is God's gift to man. As R.C. Sproul once said, work itself was part of the glorious privilege granted to men and women in creation.

Glorious privilege. And I'll point out something else before we move on. The work that God gave to Adam wasn't just physical work.

He also gave Adam intellectual work. Adam was to work with his body and his mind. Verse 19, Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them.

And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. That's quite a task, to name every single animal.

So just as God used his own intellectual creativity to form the world, he gives his image bearer, Adam, the task of using his own intellectual creativity.

- [13 : 53] So we don't think of intellectual work as a lesser form of work than physical labor or vice versa for that matter. God calls us into both kinds of work.

We use our bodies and our minds. Man was created for both kinds of work, and both kinds of work can certainly honor him. Again, Ecclesiastes says in chapter 2, verse 24, There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil.

This also, I saw, is from the hand of God. You see, we will never be more fulfilled or find more meaning than by doing what God designed and commissioned us to do.

Just the other day, I was talking with an unmarried friend, and he was telling me about this interview he heard in a podcast with a high-powered female CEO of some large corporation.

And she was talking about the challenges of dating. And she says it's a real struggle for women today to find the right guy because, and this is coming from a female, mind you, feminism has trained men to be less than masculine.

- [15 : 14] Feminism has trained men to be somewhat effeminate. She said women are searching for this quiet, sensitive guy who won't dare try to lead her, but simply support her in her own ambitions.

That's what feminism has trained women to look for in a man, but when they actually meet this man, she said, they're not satisfied with his lack of masculinity.

And as I told my friend, maybe this is because God made us, men and women, a very distinct and specific way, and you can only rebel against nature so far.

I said the woman's gut desire for a man whom her mind says she shouldn't want, that is the masculine man, just might reveal something about God's purpose in creation, the way we were actually made.

Well, as we've seen, work is given to man from the hand of God. That's what he made us for. He built us to work, and I believe we glorify him by fulfilling that calling.

- [16 : 26] Obviously, though, work today is not what it was in the garden. It's fundamentally the same, but the circumstances have changed drastically so that our work is much more difficult now.

Turn over to Genesis 3. After Adam sins, God pronounces judgment, and starting with verse 17, he says to Adam, because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, you shall not eat of it.

Cursed is the ground because of you. In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the plants of the field.

By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken, for you are dust, and to dust you shall return. Now you'll notice that God still intends for man to work, and man's labor will still produce what he needs, the food in particular that he needs, but the work itself will be much, much harder.

And we have another judgment in the next chapter on Cain specifically. After Cain kills his brother, God says in verse 12 of chapter 4, when you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength.

[17:50] Now that was a personal judgment on Cain, not all of mankind, but it's at least possible we experience something like this. It could be that not only is our work harder than it was in the garden, but the fruit of our labor actually produces less yield than it did in the garden.

In short, sin caused the earth to fight against us, if you will. Our bodies hurt more, our brains get exhausted, work can still be God-honoring, really satisfying work, but it is considerably harder to perhaps achieve lesser results.

And yet, the mandate remains. We are still built, and we are still called to work. Proverbs 10.4, a slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.

Proverbs 12.27, whoever is slothful will not roast his game, but the diligent man will get precious wealth. So the Old Testament, after the fall, frequently reminds us that we need to work, and this extends into the New Testament.

Colossians 3.23, whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men. 2 Thessalonians 3.12, now such persons, the idle, the busybodies, we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and earn their own living.

[19:30] And how about the most convicting of them all, 1 Timothy 5.8, if anyone does not provide for his relatives and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

We'll come back to that. So for those Christian men who choose to work as little as possible because, you know, they're not materialistic, the world is fleeting, et cetera, et cetera, well, they have to contend with the fact that number one, God made us to work, and number two, God commands us to work.

In fact, he commands us to work as though we are working for the Lord himself. And we can go further.

Working is so central to man's calling that it even carries over into eternity. Let me show you. In Luke chapter 19, we have the parable of the ten minas.

This is a picture of the Lord calling his servants to steward well until his second coming, until his return.

[20:49] And when he returns, men will be rewarded or they will be punished for their labors. So he gives ten minas to ten servants, one to each.

And when this nobleman in the story returns, we're told, verse 15, he ordered these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him that he might know what they had gained by doing business.

The first came before him saying, Lord, your mina has made ten minas more. And he said to him, Well done, good servant, because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.

And the second came saying, Lord, your mina has made five minas. And he said to him, and you are to be over five cities. And the story continues, but I'll stop there because this is enough to capture the point.

It's a similar lesson as what we get from the parable of the talents in Matthew 25 when he says to those who stewarded their talents well, well done, good and faithful servant.

[21 : 56] You have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master. So, what's the takeaway? Well, if these parables tell us anything, it's that our lives and our decisions now will have eternal significance.

When Christ returns, he'll evaluate what we've done, he'll evaluate even how well we've done it, and his redeemed people will be rewarded accordingly.

But, interestingly enough, the reward appears to be more responsibilities. The good stewards were not promised a larger, more comfortable hammock in heaven.

they were given authority over more cities. They were set over, presumably, to rule over more than they ever had before.

Now, wait a minute. That language sounds kind of familiar, doesn't it? Rule over, have dominion. That sounds a lot like the charge God gave to Adam in the garden.

[23 : 11] So, does this mean we will be working for all eternity? Yes, I believe that is better than a distinct possibility.

Because, as we've seen, God made us to work. He made us to work even before sin. Yes, sin has complicated the matter, to say the least about it, but what should happen once God finally and ultimately redeems his people, not to mention his creation, not to mention the whole world?

Well, according to Revelation, the earth is remade. The new Jerusalem comes down from heaven. There's a garden, just like there was at the beginning.

So, it's not an entirely different creation. It's a redeemed creation. It's a restored creation. I hesitate to phrase it quite this way, but it's almost as though the death and resurrection of Christ and what it accomplished allows God to hit reset on his creation.

Now, that may not be entirely accurate, but I trust you understand what I mean. In other words, the Bible gives us far more reasons to believe we will work for eternity than reasons to assume we won't.

[24 : 27] Forget this floating around on clouds playing harps for all eternity. I don't see that in Scripture at all. And you know, when I've talked about this before with others who have maybe never heard it or considered it, you know, the response is always surprise.

Really? And that's usually followed by them saying, well, now that I think about it, that makes a lot of sense. And I really believe it does.

And I point this out because work is not some secondary aspect of the Christian life. It is quite central to serving the Lord, particularly as men.

We are created in the image of God who is a working God. And He put man on the earth to work. The Old Testament commands us to work. The New Testament commands us to work as we are working for the Lord.

Forget whether you're employed by men. That's relevant, but it's a side point. We're working for the Lord. Paul says we are worse than an unbeliever if we don't work and support our families.

[25 : 41] And then it's implied that work is going to continue for all eternity. That sounds pretty significant, doesn't it? Think about the Ten Commandments, those moral rules that govern all of life.

Well, one of those commandments says, remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy six days you shall labor and do all your work. And He continues, but you know, it really is not that subtle.

It's right there in the most overlooked commandment of course, we have this implication that we rest one day of the week because we are working the other six days.

That's just assumed, men. You're out there working six days a week. That's why we need the day of rest. Now, to be clear, not every job is equal in its nature or value.

And as Christians, we want to evaluate our work differently than the rest of the world does. For example, the size of the salary isn't necessarily the most important thing to consider.

[26:55] Prestige isn't the most important thing to consider. We have to evaluate our work by a higher standard. And Richard Phillips in his book gives us five questions to ask ourselves, so let's run through these.

Number one, does this work glorify God? Does this work glorify God? We exist, of course, to glorify God.

Paul says, whatever you do, do all for the glory of God or to the glory of God. So the first thing to consider is whether we can truly honor God through our work or through our jobs.

Or would this job put me in a position where I'd be forced to or at least overly tempted to sin? Maybe it's a sales position that incentivizes deception.

Maybe it's a job that exploits people. Maybe it's a job that promotes ungodliness. I was thinking about this this week and every day I pass by a billboard for a pot shop.

[28:05] And I thought to myself, if I was the guy responsible for putting up the billboard, would I do it? Could I do it? We have to remember that we're not only called to work.

We're also called to, for example, love your neighbor as yourself. Can you do that in your job?

Can you be a man of integrity in your job? Can you work while also keeping all of the other commandments God has given us? Can you glorify God in your work?

Number two, does it benefit my fellow man? Again, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

That's the second great command. And here we're asking ourselves whether the job is actually helping others or is it merely self-serving? In Ephesians 4.28, Paul writes, let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

[29:19] Now notice how Paul explicitly ties work to loving and helping others. Now his primary point may have been that if we work, we have more resources from which to give, but I think it's also true that the work itself can help those in need.

a plumber helps people by fixing their plumbing. A postal worker helps people by delivering the mail. Doctors and nurses provide health care.

And for this reason, someone might actually take, believe it or not, a lower paying job simply because they feel like it will help more people or maybe help people in more significant ways.

what did Jesus say? It is more blessed to give than to receive. Number three, do I sense a calling to this work?

Do I sense a calling to this work? And by calling, I don't mean we hear the voice of God telling us what job or career path to take. what I mean is God gives each of us particular gifts.

[30:40] We have distinct interests. Think of those craftsmen in Exodus 31 who all had particular and unique abilities to help bring the tabernacle together.

Right? Well, you and I have unique interests. We have unique gifts which we can put to use in our daily labors. So I guess the question is can I do this job well and will I find some satisfaction in it?

Now, you may not love it. It may not be your favorite thing in the world and it may be temporary. But does the work line up with how God has gifted you?

Especially in your current season of life. Whatever you do, let's keep in mind the exhortation in Ecclesiastes 9.10. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.

Put your heart into it. Even if you don't love it, even if you know it's only temporary, you can still glorify God through it. Number four, does it provide for material needs and enable generosity?

[32 : 03] Then we have a responsibility to take care of our families. Again, Paul says it plainly, if anyone does not provide for his relatives and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

So, money, money's not the only factor in choosing a job. I wouldn't even say it's the primary factor. But it is absolutely a factor.

And we can look at this in two ways. First, we need to find a job that makes enough money to support our families and second, keep this in mind, we need to ensure that we're not living above our means.

that's part of the responsibility as well. But we also need to add to this because as Christians, we not only have a responsibility to take care of our families, but we have a responsibility to give.

When Paul writes to the Ephesians, he tells them that it's good to work, but the primary motivation he gives is not self-serving. He doesn't say, let him labor doing honest work with his own hands so that he may buy more stuff or add more money to his bank account.

[33 : 23] No, he says, let him labor that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Now, having said this, I'll say again that money is not the primary factor in choosing a job or career.

For instance, a larger salary will not justify a job that fails to glorify God or fails to serve others in godly ways.

It will always be better to have less trusting in God's provision than to gain wealth in unrighteous ways. As Proverbs 16.8 says, better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice.

And number five, does it permit a godly and balanced life?

In other words, will this job permit me to keep my other God-given responsibilities? Work is not our only calling from God.

[34 : 34] we have to leave room for family, for the church, for rest. If we don't, there's either a problem with us or there's a problem with the job itself.

Now, we do want to recognize that there may be seasons in life where we have to commit more time to work. But we want these seasons as much as possible to be temporary.

They should be exceptions, not the lifelong norm. Jesus says, what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? Work is good and it is necessary.

As we've talked about, we can help others and we can glorify God through our work. But work is not everything. And we have to learn the right balance to prevent our commitment to work from hurting ourselves physically or spiritually, from hurting our church by withholding our particular gifts from the body because we're never there, or hurting our families.

Now, men, I think, have a tendency to excuse themselves in this area of life. And it comes pretty easily. I've had men complain to me that their wives were just nagging and nagging because they're never home.

[36 : 08] They're always at work. And these men will often defend themselves saying something like, well, I just don't understand why my wife doesn't get it. I'm the man.

I've got to put food on the table. I'm supposed to be working. You see, these men, they know their calling. They know the importance of work. That's not the issue.

And maybe for some of them, the job does demand it for a season. Again, we want to recognize that. But men, and let's be honest with ourselves, will often pour more of themselves into their work than what is actually necessary.

I know I've been guilty of this, and I'm not even sure I can explain why. Maybe it goes back to the fact that work is satisfying for men, because by working, we're doing what God has designed and called us to do.

Maybe that's it. But do you know what else is satisfying? Loving your wife, raising your children, being an active member of the church, taking time off for rest.

[37 : 25] In fact, I will say with a lot of confidence that your work will be all the more satisfying if you make room for the other things God has called us to do.

If you can find the right balance, it will be that much more satisfying. And if you don't feel like you're a good judge of whether you found the right balance, and we often aren't, ask your wife.

She'll tell you. Ask your children. Ask your pastors. Ask your brothers and sisters in the church. Ask close friends. Maybe ask all of them. And perhaps they can judge the situation better than you can.

In short, we need to pursue work that glorifies God, that benefits others, that utilizes our gifts and abilities, that provides for our families, that allows us to be generous, and permits a godly and balanced life.

God, in 2 Corinthians 5, verse 9, Paul writes, whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him, that is, the Lord.

[38 : 51] So the last point I'll make is that we need to set aside what pleases us the most. Let's just put that aside for a moment. We need to set aside what might please the world or what might make us look best in the eyes of men.

Our priority in our work should be pleasing God. Years ago, I read a book called *How Starbucks Saved My Life*.

I found it at the library, and I read the title, and I thought to myself, how in the world could Starbucks save anyone's life? And I mean, I love coffee as much as the next guy, but I can't imagine giving Starbucks credit for saving my life.

Maybe saving a morning or two, but not my life. Well, I read the book, and what happened was this man lost his high-paying corporate job.

And so while he was searching for a new job, he would go into Starbucks every morning, sip some coffee, and work on his laptop, and try to find another position. And long story short, this middle-aged man could not find a job anywhere.

[40 : 06] And he ended up working as a barista at Starbucks. He eventually threw on the green apron and went to work with all the high school and college kids.

And it's actually a really touching story, but more to the point, I suspect that there are quite a few men out there that might be way too proud to ever work at a Starbucks.

The Bible essentially says, never mind what anyone else thinks. You are ultimately working for an audience of one. Again, Paul says, whatever you do, if you're a high-paid CEO or you're a janitor, 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. And so, one of the key takeaways for me is that if you are doing your job well, whatever that job is, there is no shame in it.

there is no shame in it. You can scrub toilets to the glory of God. And for all I know, my reward in heaven will be doing something just like that.

[41 : 33] I don't know. Maybe I'll be heaven's janitor, and I'll never be more satisfied. Whatever you're doing now, do it well, and one day, you will see the full reward of it.

Let's pray. Father, we stand in awe that from the beginning you are a God who works. You created, you ordered, you subdued chaos into beauty, and in your image you made us to work, to cultivate, to build, to create, to serve.

But we confess, Lord, that our hearts are often lazy, often self-centered. we grumble at the very thing you designed to be our joy. But Lord, Christ has redeemed us, not only from our guilt, but from the futility of this world.

And now, to some degree, every swing of the hammer, every key pressed on the keyboard, every chore we do can be holy and satisfying, if done in faith, for your glory.

So, Father, make us to be diligent men. Make us glad in our work. Make us servants of others, generous and faithful and steady.

[42 : 57] And when we fail, when we falter, remind us that Christ himself worked to the end. He finished the work you gave him to do so that we might live and work forever in your presence.

Do this, Lord. for the glory of your name. And it's in Christ we pray. Amen.