



Goals for a Brighter Future Bible Study

Developing Meaningful Work

If you are not familiar with this year's World Services theme, please check out this video:
<https://youtu.be/ABmwt14EoEY>

As a part of this theme, we have been sharing various projects and programs within the international Salvation Army that strive to develop meaningful work. To learn more, visit our website!
<https://centralmissions.org/gfbf/>

This resource is a Bible study about Developing Meaningful Work. A lot of the information was adapted from the teachings of Dr. Tim Mackie on the podcast Exploring My Strange Bible, the Theology of Work series. Believe it or not, there is a lot to learn about work from the Bible! Feel free to use for personal study or with a virtual small group! Possible answers to the reflection questions have been included as the italicized text below but feel free to let the conversation go in a different direction!

How would you define Work?

Dictionary definition: activity involving mental or physical effort done in order to achieve a purpose or result.

For many, in our world today, work is a means of survival. Not having a job could mean no food, no home, no opportunity for higher education or no healthcare.

What scripture, if any, do you think about when you think of the word Work?

Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9), Ruth gleaning crops (Ruth 2), Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16), Colossians 3:23 "Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people."

The Biblical vision of work is not survival – it is an “others” centered vision – it is sharing. We are going to explore this idea more by looking into the creation story.

Read Genesis 1 and 2

As He created the heavens and the earth, God is the first worker mentioned in the Bible. As God works in the creation story, He is bringing order out of the disorder. Having work and doing work is incredibly dignifying. Work was part of God's original design for Eden. In the beginning, we are given the perfect example of work from God as He creates the Heavens and Earth and every living thing. Humans resemble the image of God more closely by imitating God through their own work.

Read Genesis 1:27 again

God created humans uniquely in His image and our propensity to create and to work comes from Him. When God created Adam and Eve, they were the only creatures He instructed to be fruitful and multiply. This is significant. For example, let's compare the creation of fruit trees with the creation of humans. If you plant apple trees and leave them, eventually you will get apples and maybe some more apple trees. Humans following God's instruction – “be fruitful and multiply” - will result in the creation of families, neighborhoods, cities, along with languages, art, music, food, culture etc... Rather than the apple trees



just growing more apple trees, humans have an innate tendency to work and create. Additionally, if you were to give an apple tree to a human, you might end up with a farmer's market or the person might be able to breed a more delicious version of an apple. When humans are free to do work such as this, they resemble the image of God more closely. God's original vision of work in Eden was to bring order, beauty, and benefit to others.

Read Genesis 3

In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. After this, the idyllic vision of work became tainted. He says there will now be resistance to your work. Unfortunately, the world we live in includes work that is exploitative, painful, and unfair.

Before the fall, work had a very good and dignified definition: to bring order, beauty, and benefit for others. What happened after the fall?

Read Genesis 3:17-19 again

Today, we live in a post-resurrection world. We are no longer chained to this curse from verses 17-19. We hold these truths about work together in tension: "Thorns and thistles" and order, beauty and benefit. Because of Jesus, the doors of heaven have been opened and the original idyllic vision of work is possible. As followers of Christ, it is a part of our responsibility to unchain others from the "thorns and thistles" of this world. We can be active participants in this!

In what ways have you seen the thorns and thistles of work in our world?

Often what comes to mind are things like labor exploitation, unfair wages, too many hours. But this could also be companies not offering benefits to their employees, poor work/life balance, improper vocational training, child labor.

In what ways have you seen the order, beauty and benefit of work?

Collaboration, creativity, freedom, education

Part of bringing God's Kingdom to earth, is developing meaningful work.

In what ways can you bring glimpses of the Kingdom through work?

Shining a light on unethical labor when you become aware of it

Educating yourself on the labor it requires for things you use daily or weekly in your home (check out our Going Deeper Resource and learn about the production process of cinnamon!)

If you are in a management position, encouraging a healthy work/life balance

Praying for unemployed people

Praying for The Salvation Army vocational training programs around the world (check out our Prayer Cards about this! <https://centralmissions.org/gfbf/>)