



NAVIGATORS WORKPLACE

THE APPRENTICE PROCESS



Lesson: The Biblical View of Work

Work is Service and Worship to the Lord

Conversation Starter: Is work a good thing or bad thing?

The Two Sides of the Work Coin

Work occupies a significant portion of our lives. Next to sleep (which can take up a third of our day), work is likely the next biggest time investment. In a typical Western schedule, with 8 hours of work and 8 hours of sleep, we're left with 8 hours for personal time – meals, family, hobbies, and the like. This reality has led some to question the purpose of work, viewing it as a barrier to the truly important aspects of life. They might argue for a world where basic needs are met by government or wealth redistribution, freeing us to pursue our passions.

On the other hand, some see work as humanity's greatest achievement. They believe our success and legacy are tied to our professional achievements. For them, work and profit take priority, with the belief that dedication drives societal progress and benefits families. These individuals, often referred to as



“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”
Colossians 3:23-24

Workaholics tend to prioritize work over personal connections. Their intense focus can generate wealth and prosperity, but it often ruins relationships.

Which side of the coin would represent you? Why do you view work that way?

Story: Working Apart from God

Kenny found himself in unfamiliar territory upon his arrival in Michigan, accompanying a friend returning home to assist his family. Despite growing up in a Christian household out west, Kenny had strayed from his faith, and at 25, he was grappling with the consequences. Having been cast out of his family home at 18, he had been navigating life's challenges independently ever since. However, without the guidance of his parents, he succumbed to the allure of drinking and drugs. However, recognizing the need for change, he sought a fresh start.

Opting to enlist in the army, Kenny successfully completed boot camp. Yet, his past caught up with him during a routine drug test upon his return from a brief holiday, resulting in an honorable discharge. Once again, Kenny found himself at a crossroads.

Entering the workforce, Kenny fell into a pattern of employment, repeatedly terminated with excuses that shielded him from acknowledging his own shortcomings. Blaming the system and attributing his struggles to the perceived injustices perpetrated by the wealthy, Kenny failed to recognize his own role in his misfortunes.

However, through attending church and receiving mentorship, Kenny began to gain clarity. He confronted the realities of his past failures, acknowledging how his indulgences had contributed to his downfall. Armed with newfound insight from Scripture, he resolved to make a change.

Approaching a local grocery store with determination and guided by his mentor, Kenny impressed the manager with his boldness and the support of his mentor. Committing himself to hard work, punctuality, and a dedication to serving God through his labor, Kenny found purpose even in the mundane task of stocking groceries. With kindness, he greeted customers and eagerly fulfilled his duties, earning the respect of both his manager and customers.

His diligence did not go unnoticed. Kenny's commitment led to increased hours and greater responsibilities, with the potential for further advancement within the company if he chooses to remain.

What do you think kept Kenny from realizing *his role* in his failures at work?

Who did Kenny blame for his failures? How would that way of thinking have affected his employment experience? What attitude helped him to succeed?

Striking a Balance with Work

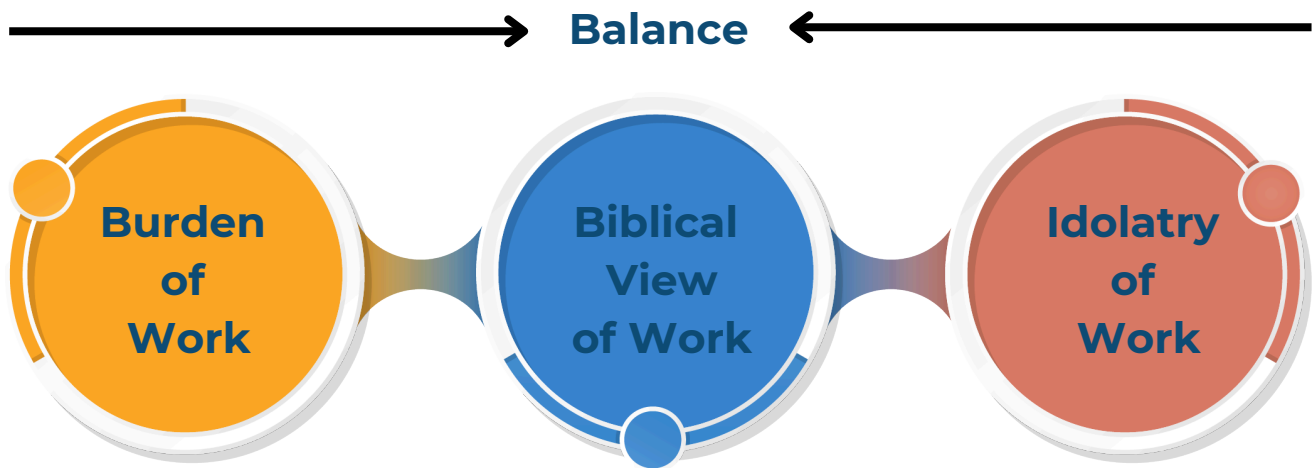
The Bible reveals God's original intention for work. In Genesis, we see work as part of a perfect world – the Garden of Eden – which God declared "good" (Genesis 1:31). Before Adam even had a family, God entrusted him with the task of "**working** the garden of Eden and to take care of it" (Genesis 2:15). The Hebrew word for work in this passage is *abad* (עָבַד), which can be translated in a few different ways throughout Scripture, but was initially translated as work or labor. However, this view of work paints a surprising picture: work wasn't separate from paradise, it was an element of it!

This might seem counterintuitive. Relaxation on a beach might seem more idyllic than work. However, it's important to remember that this was a world without sin. The hardships we associate with work – pain, frustration, and drudgery – didn't exist yet. Work, in this context, was a way for humans to function within God's perfect creation, just as grass and sheep each serve a purpose.

Everything changed with the fall of humanity (Genesis 3). Adam and Eve's rebellion fractured their relationship with God, expelling them from paradise and leaving them with a corrupted world. Death entered the world, and work became "toil" (Genesis 3:17). It's interesting to note that God had already established the concept of Sabbath rest before the fall (Genesis 2:2-3). Work was meant to be balanced with time dedicated to God. However, after the fall, work became burdensome, filled with difficulties, while true rest became harder to find, as humanity was separated from its source.

In essence, the Bible doesn't portray work as inherently good or bad. Work has the potential to be fulfilling, reflecting our role as caretakers within God's creation. However, the fall of humanity introduced challenges that make work more difficult. Understanding God's original intention for work can help us navigate these challenges and find a more balanced perspective.

Why might people have a tendency to view work as either good or bad? What are the dangers associated with making such an oversimplification?



Work as Worship

Although the Hebrew root word abad (עָבַד) is first used in Scripture to signify work, it is also used in another way to refer to worship. For example, in Exodus 8:1, God instructs Moses to say to Pharaoh, "Let my people go, so that they may **worship** (abad) me." This usage of the word connects the act of work and worship.

In the very beginning, Adam's ability to live out his function in God's perfect creation was an act of worship to God. His obedient life, unmarked by sin, honored and gave glory to God. For the nation of Israel, their ability to live and function as a nation set apart, instructed in the Law of God, and obeying his commands also gave God honor and glory. This was an active role of worship.

In other words, our work can be a form of worship when we do it for God's glory and according to his will. When we work with excellence, integrity, and compassion, seeking obedience and casting off sin by living in the redemptive power of the Gospel, we are reflecting the character of God. We are also showing the world that we are his people and that He is our Lord.

How does this view of worship compare to the way that you have viewed worship in the past? When people typically say the word worship, what are they referring to? Take turns sharing your thoughts.

Work as Service

A third way that the root word abad (עָבַד) is used is as service. Joshua boldly declares in the end of the Book of Joshua, "Now fear the Lord and **serve** (abad) him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and **serve** (abad) the Lord. But if **serving** (abad) the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will **serve** (abad), whether the gods your ancestors **served** (abad) beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will **serve** (abad) the Lord." Joshua 24:14-15

It appears that the Holy Spirit who authored this passage of Scripture is highlighting that it doesn't just matter what we do, but who we do it for. He also seems to be saying that our service to God goes beyond a one time event. It is the moment by moment, day by day act of placing God first and choosing his will for our life.

Many Christians find it hard to bring their faith to work. Why might this occur?

New Testament Parallels Connecting Work, Service and Worship

The Hebrew root word abad, meaning "to work," "to serve," or "to worship," is only used in the Old Testament because the New Testament was written in Greek and Aramaic. However, the New Testament contains parallels. For example, Paul writes in **Colossians 3:23-24**:

Whatever you do, **work** at it with all your heart, as **working** for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are **serving**. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favoritism.

These verses instruct servants to remember that their work and service are connected to God. Paul also emphasizes that our work should be done "with all your heart." This connection transcends the individual relationship between a master and servant or a boss and employee; it extends to our relationship with God.

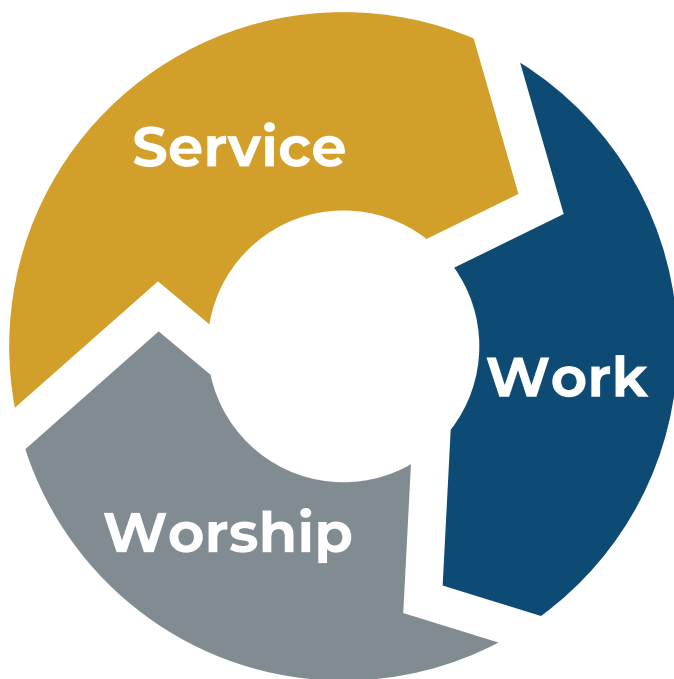
Have you ever viewed your work as an opportunity to serve God? How might that way of thinking change your work experience?

In Paul's letter to the Romans, we see an additional piece of context between what we do with our bodies and our worship of God. In Romans 12:1-2, he says: Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper **worship**. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Once again we see this connection between work, service, and worship. It should be pointed out that this classification of work extends beyond vocational work and can be applied to all work that is performed and which can be viewed as service and worship to God.

Living as God's People and His Ambassadors to the World

This understanding alone could change the face of Christianity in the Western world and abroad. Imagine the impact that Christians might have if they viewed their work as service and worship to God. Christianity will always have mockers, but living this way would allow believer to shine the light of Jesus in all the dark places of the world. It would also be an ideal springboard for making disciples among the lost.



Homework:

- Memory Verse- Colossians 3:23-24
- Daily Time With God read one of the following-
- Genesis 2:15
- Exodus 8:1
- Joshua 24:14-15
- Romans 12:1-2
- What steps can you take to begin to serve and worship God at work? Begin practicing them and be ready to share next time.