

WORK AS SERVICE

In this section, we will explore what God expects of us in our work. What is our service to God and others, and how do we pursue it?

21. A constant tension for most of us is how to integrate all the competing elements of life. We still feel “compartmentalized.” How do the following scriptures demonstrate integration?

MATTHEW 22:37–40

³⁷Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

MATTHEW 25:31–40

³¹“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

³⁷“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

⁴⁰“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’”

1 JOHN 4:10–11, 19–21

¹⁰This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

¹⁹We love because he first loved us. ²⁰If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.

A disciple of Jesus Christ is an “amateur;” in the root sense of this term; namely, one who acts out of love rather than because of some professional obligation.

“The Bible teaches...that we should plan and live our life as a unity in which nothing is secular and everything is in a real sense sacred, because everything is being done for the glory of God—that is, to show appreciation for what he has made, to please him by loving obedience to his commands, and to advance his honor and praise among his creatures, starting with the homage and adoration that we render to him ourselves. Nothing is to be viewed as less than sacred; there is to be no compartmentalizing of our daily doings; work is to be a unifying reality that holds all our life together.”

J.I. Packer



For a more extended treatment of fragmentation in our lives, see Section 3 of Module 4.

22.3 What is the relationship between “work” and “ministry”?

We should not conclude that to be a professional religious worker is an inferior occupation. Such people are often set aside “so that the Body of Christ may be built up”—Ephesians 4:12. However, their functions do not mean that they become a special caste or elite.

23. “There are different kinds of service (diakonia) and...different kinds of working (energema).”

1 CORINTHIANS 12:4–11

⁴There are different kinds of gifts (*charisma*), but the same Spirit. ⁵There are different kinds of service (*diakonia*), but the same Lord. ⁶There are different kinds of working (*energema*), but the same God works all of them in all men.

⁷Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, ¹⁰to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

23.1 What does this passage tell us about the variety of our occupations?

23.2 Is there a hierarchy of work in which some jobs are more “spiritual” than others?

and that you are now doing (*ergon*) more than you did at first.

²⁰Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. ²¹I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. ²²So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways (*ergon*). ²³I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds (*ergon*). ²⁴Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan’s so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): ²⁵Only hold on to what you have until I come.

²⁶To him who overcomes and does my will (*ergon*) to the end, I will give authority over the nations—

²⁷‘He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery’—

just as I have received authority from my Father.

²⁸I will also give him the morning star. ²⁹He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

“The prioritizing of ‘ministry’ over ‘work’ is now a fatal disease in Western Christianity. The work of the ministry has triumphed over the ministry of work. Careers and jobs are listed in the minds of believers from top to bottom in a scale of holiness and eternal relevance: missionaries and pastors on the top and stock-brokers on the bottom.”
Paul Stevens

“You represent Jesus Christ to the world, not just by your speech and morality, but also by your work. If you are salt and light to the world, you must be salt and light in your work, too.”
Jerry & Mary White

25.1 What does the Spirit select for praise among the believers in Thyatira?

25.2 The Spirit “knows our deeds.” How can we function in the marketplace in such a way as to strengthen the qualities identified in Thyatira and others of the Seven Churches?

25.3 “I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.” Consider Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 3:10–15 (below). To what extent is the Christian life a matter of performance?

1 CORINTHIANS 3:10–15

¹⁰“By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. ¹¹For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. ¹⁴If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. ¹⁵If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.



25.4 Work will be judged...and what we have built on the foundation of Jesus Christ will survive. What does this tell us about the importance of our daily productivity—the things we construct for our Lord?

The believers in the Seven Churches are not judged on typical “ministry” activities, such as evangelism or discipling, but on their routine adherence to God’s Word and their loyalty to their first love, Jesus Christ, as they are shaped in everything by His perspectives, while surrounded by the “Jezebel” of temptation. What God advocates, here, is central to our conduct in the marketplace.

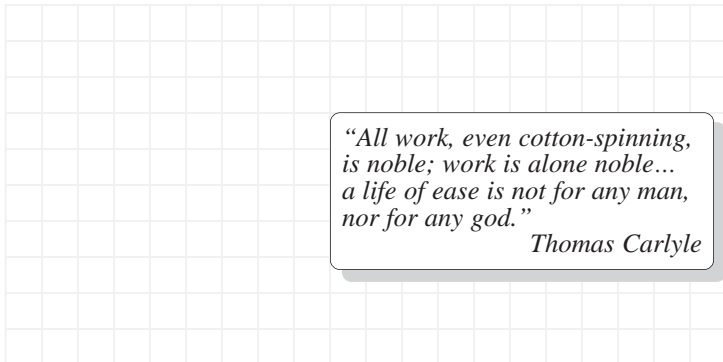
26. *In Matthew 25:14–30, Jesus tells us what the Kingdom of heaven will be like. The immediate focus is the use of money, but the principles are wider. Money or property (v14–15) is used to illustrate the reality that we have differing levels of resources, ability and capacity. Indeed, here is an application of God’s mandate that we “be fruitful...subdue...rule over,” in Genesis 1:28. As you read the story, make notes in order to answer Question 26.1.*

GENESIS 1:28

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

MATTHEW 25:14–30

¹⁴“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. ¹⁵To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.



“All work, even cotton-spinning, is noble; work is alone noble... a life of ease is not for any man, nor for any god.”
 Thomas Carlyle

¹⁶The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. ¹⁷So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. ¹⁸But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

¹⁹“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’

²¹“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’

²²“The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’

²³“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’

²⁴“Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

²⁶“His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.’

²⁸“‘Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. ²⁹For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. ³⁰And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

“When work began to be viewed in primarily economic terms with the arrival of the industrial revolution, it became customary to look upon work as something the worker owns and sells to the highest bidder. As alternatives to that view, capitalism often operates on the premise that the employer owns the work of people (since work is a means of production), while socialism operates on the premise that society owns work. But the Christian view of the worker as steward suggests something truly revolutionary: God is the rightful owner of human work...work can be redeemed from many of the effects of the fall. The key elements in that redemption are a realization that common work in the world bears God's approval, the belief that God calls us to our work, and an awareness that we are stewards who serve God with the work He has entrusted to us.”

Leland Ryken

“If you are called to be a street sweeper, sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. Sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, ‘here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.’”

Martin Luther King, Jr.

26.1 Study the above scriptures and complete these statements:

a. Work is owned by...

b. God expects...

c. Work is the responsibility of...

d. God judges...

e. Faithfulness is identified as...

f. God’s approval results in...

26.2 Why do you think the servant who did not invest is called “wicked” (verse 26) as well as lazy? Did he sin or did he merely lack financial competence?

27. Work is part of God’s purpose for us. Therefore, we must make practical and energetic use of work opportunities through our stewardship of the skills and resources entrusted to us.

EPHESIANS 2:10

For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

COLOSSIANS 3:23–24

²³Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, ²⁴since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

2 TIMOTHY 2:20–21

²⁰In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. ²¹If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

1 PETER 4:10–11

¹⁰Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. ¹¹If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

“Much religion has built on the idea that the material order— reality as experienced through the body, along with the body that experiences it—is evil, and therefore to be refused and ignored as far as possible. This view, which dehumanizes its devotees, has sometimes called itself Christian, but it is really as un-Christian as can be. For matter, being made by God, was and is good in his eyes, and so should be so in ours. We serve God by using and enjoying temporal things gratefully, with a sense of their value to him their Maker, and of his generosity in giving them to us.”

J.I. Packer