

# Themes of a Theology of Work

11 points with bibliography and resources



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## Introduction

### **A disconnect often exists between belief and the workplace.**

We know that Jesus has commanded His people to make disciples of all nations, from here to the ends of the earth. For most of God's people, the primary venue where this should happen is the workplace, where people spend most of their week. Yet it seems that few view their workplace with a divine perspective.

For example, how many believers in the "secular work force" wake up Monday morning with a mindset like this:

"God, I'm going to my ministry, where you have called me to work creatively and with integrity, to display You to others for their good and to make disciples. I'm going to work. Show me what that looks like and in whom You want me to invest."

We believe this has not been the normal approach for Jesus' followers. For centuries, the church has often viewed pastoral and missionary work as being the most spiritual way of serving God and others, with such "full-time ministry" having more spiritual value than the secular workplace, even if not expressly compared in that way. Those in secular jobs are seen as having a few moments on the weekend or evenings to do "ministry" by being Sunday school teachers, elders, helpers, musicians, etc. There's nothing wrong with these church ministries at all, but something is wrong with this disconnect between ministry and the workplace.

Instead, what are the biblical realities that should inform God's people as they bring the gospel into every aspect of life? The following themes support a biblical theology of work.

## Themes of a Theology of Work

### **1. God's purpose is to display His glory throughout the world. | [Genesis 1:26-28](#)**

In Genesis we read, "Let us make man in Our image ... fill the earth and subdue it." Right from the beginning, we understand that we were created like God to worship and enjoy a love relationship with Him and to fill the earth with His image — to display His glory throughout the world.

These verses have been called **The Cultural Mandate**. More than just a command to procreate, these verses show that humanity reflects the image of God throughout the earth by stewarding the creation as His vice-regents, ruling over all as people create culture and civilization. God's original purpose, which has not changed, was that humanity might continue God's creative work, expressing His image through being creative and building culture.

**2. The entrance of sin corrupted the image of God in us, but His image is still there.** | [Genesis 3](#)

Culture and civilization reflect our corruption. Instead of worshipping the only true Creator God, humanity now worships idols of various sorts through which salvation is sought for this life and/or the life to come. This idolatry manifests itself in different ways through the different ethnic and workplace cultures that man creates. The result of this corruption is that work is hard and disappointing, characterized by the innate selfishness of fallen man and resultant conflict that ensues. Stemming from this are feelings of guilt, shame and fear which are often masked by pride. The entrance of sin means our world is broken, people are exploited and life does not work as God intended.

**3. God's redemption through the incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus begins the reversal of the fall.** | [John 1:1, 14](#); [1 Corinthians 10:31](#); [2 Corinthians 5:17-21](#); [Matthew 6:10](#)

After His death and resurrection for our sins, Jesus ascended to His heavenly throne and has inaugurated His kingdom reign ([Acts 2:32-36](#); [Colossians 1:13](#); [1 Timothy 6:15](#)). When God redeems us — transferring us to the kingdom of His Son — He not only saves us *from* sin, but He saves us *to* the original purpose for which we were created: to worship and enjoy Him, displaying His glory throughout the world as we steward the creation in righteousness and justice. The incarnation of the Son of God and His life on earth demonstrating and proclaiming the Gospel in deed and word provide the example par excellence of what it means for us to display His glory. In so doing, we bless the world that God so loves, enabling it to flourish according to the measure of the gospel's impact in the setting where we are bringing the blessing of His kingdom. The effects of the Genesis 3 fall *begin* to be reversed as God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven, looking to that final day of Jesus' return when His kingdom will be manifest in its fullness. This "already but not yet" kingdom has enormous implications for our work, society and culture, not to speak of our individual salvation and sanctification. The great global purpose of God begins here — His glory is to be displayed among all nations through His people where they live and work. The Great Commission starts here!

**4. We work for the common good.** | [Genesis 1:26-28](#); [Matthew 22:36-40](#); [Galatians 6:10](#)

This is premised upon the cultural mandate to display God's glory in all the earth, the Great Commandment to love God and others, and the mandate in Galatians to do good to all people, especially those of the household of faith. It reminds us that work is not just for our individual satisfaction — a paycheck and personal fulfillment — but contributes to the greater well-being of God's world that He wants to bless and to the advance of His kingdom.

**5. The design and dignity of work reflect God who gave us work.** | [Genesis 2:15](#)

Genesis 2:15 says, "Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it." Work is built into humanity's DNA as a reflection of the God who worked to create us in His image. From the manual laborer (like God who worked the dust to create us, and later became a carpenter) to the artist (like God who created the infinite beauty of the universe and all that is in it), all honest work has dignity because we are doing what we were made to do as image-bearers of a working God.

**6. Our work is our vocation and calling.** | [1 Corinthians 7:17](#)

“Vocation” or “calling” simply means that God assigns and calls us to our various jobs and situations where we are to walk as believers and make disciples. That vocation is a calling to holiness, love and service wherever we are working. The vast majority of God’s people do not spend their lives in church ministry. Rather, they work in offices, schools, hospitals, stores, factories, etc. In these places, believers can know that God has called them to work and to display Him there as much as He has called their pastor to the church. Their work is their sacred vocation and venue to love God and others. They are salt and light, tasked by Jesus to bring His love to life — a task against which the gates of hell will not prevail ([Matthew 16:18](#)).

**7. Jesus is our boss.** | [Ephesians 6:5-9](#); [Colossians 3:22-25](#)

These passages in Ephesians and Colossians are probably the most work-related texts in the New Testament. Multiple times in both passages, the apostle Paul highlights the reality that we are ultimately working for Jesus who is our heavenly Master/Boss whether we are slaves or free, employees or employers. Serving Him involves obedience, respect, reverence for the Lord and sincere, whole-hearted service for others. In Titus, Paul adds, “...not to talk back ... not to steal ... but to show that [we] can be fully trusted, so that in every way [we] will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive” ([Titus 2:9, 10](#)). Christ-like character and actions validate our gospel words.

Interestingly, Paul is addressing followers of Christ working in the broken environment of New Testament-era slavery, characterized by everything from good relationships to petty annoyances to outright abuse. That’s not unlike workplaces today throughout the world. Those environments are the venues where enemy love is demonstrated — loving others in the context of mistreatment while doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly with God ([Micah 6:8](#)). Whatever our workplace venue or position, we know that our real boss, Jesus, does not show favoritism, but will reward those who do good and will repay those who do wrong. Significantly, both the Ephesians and Colossians passages conclude with this sober reminder to encourage and admonish.

We are mediators who stand between God and the people of our workplace, representing them to God and representing God to them.

**8. We are His priests.** | [1 Peter 2:9](#)

In light of the enormous dichotomy that existed between the clergy and laity of the Church in the 16th century Reformation, the priesthood of all believers was an important theological awakening. In Jesus, we have direct access to God and we are *all* ministers in our world. We are mediators who stand between God and the people of our workplace, representing them to God and representing God to them. It reminds us that life is an integrated whole; that all of life is sacred: the home, neighborhood, the church and the workplace. Thus, the workplace is indeed a sacred field of ministry in which we love and serve others. For most of God’s people, in light of the volume of time that we spend there, it’s the primary ministry venue (besides the home) for disciple-making priests.

**9. We love God and others through our work.** | [Matthew 22:37-40](#); [John 13:34, 35](#)

The purpose of life for all humanity is summed up in this: loving God supremely and our neighbor sacrificially, just as Jesus loves us. In Jesus, we are able to fulfill the [Genesis 1](#) purpose for which we were created. Through our love, we bring others into relationship with God, and they in turn do that with others (i.e., we make disciples). Transformation begins to occur in individual lives, in

community and, ultimately, in society as we enter and engage it for its well-being — the common good. Consequently, the great mission of God through the gospel, which aims at nothing less than the reversal of all the consequences of sin and evil in our world, is moved along until that day when Jesus returns. For most of God's people, the primary setting for this drama of God's transformational love, after the home, is the workplace. It is also a principal venue where we are transformed and shaped to be agents of His love towards our workplace neighbors.

**10. There is great kingdom potential for marketplace workers in the global arena.** | [Acts 2](#)

The spread of the gospel in the New Testament era was not primarily due to professional apostles and evangelists like Paul, Peter or Philip who were few in number. Rather, it was through countless ordinary believers taking the gospel wherever they went. Acts 2 records the first gospel message by Peter given to Jews, proselytes and God-fearers from more than a dozen geographical areas. They, in turn, returned to their own lands with that message. It is very possible that the church in Rome began through new believers returning there after the Acts 2 events. In [Acts 11](#), believers who were scattered because of persecution were responsible for the beginnings of the Antioch church.

**Job-takers:**

*those who take their jobs overseas*

**Job-makers:**

*those who make jobs for others overseas*

[Which one are you?](#)

God's people have the unique opportunity in their workplaces to encounter people with different worldviews, religious backgrounds and social conditions. Dale Losch says this in his book, [A Better Way](#), "The workplace in North America and beyond is the most strategic place of ministry for most of Christ's followers. It is where we find the hurting and the lost. And for the vast majority of people, it is their main hub of relationships." Into this place of ministry, locally and globally, God's people are uniquely gifted to carry the good news — Christ in us, the hope of glory ([Colossians 1:27](#)).

Furthermore, the areas of our world with least access to Jesus — about 40 percent of the world's population — are in areas off-limits to vocational religious workers. However, there is great potential for two types of workers. First, **job-takers:** *those who take their jobs overseas* through transfers (requested or required) or independently finding a job overseas. In either case they become intentional about workplace opportunities herein described. Second, **job-makers:** *those who make jobs overseas*, such as entrepreneurs who create jobs in the name of Jesus as an expression of His love addressing that least-reached community's greatest material need — a good job.

**11. "There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God."** | [Hebrews 4:9, 10](#); [Genesis 2:2-3](#)

It is significant that immediately after humanity was created, God rested from His work and eventually commanded His people to observe the Sabbath. In the Old Testament, the Sabbath is connected to God's sovereignty in creation (Exodus 20:8-11), God's redemption from slavery (Deuteronomy 5:12-15) and the joy in the Lord associated with a world set right (Isaiah 58:11-14). The New Testament draws an analogy from Genesis and exhorts people to enter God's rest through belief in the gospel by which they rest from their own meritorious works. This Sabbath rest reminds us that only by trust in the gospel do we have the grace and power to love God and others as we are commanded. It further reminds us that God is sovereign in His dealings with us, based upon His love and redemption from sin; and that we look forward to our joyous rest and shalom when He restores all things through the resurrection of Jesus. Respecting the biblical rhythm of one day out of seven for respite from our work points us to these eternal truths. •

## Bibliography and Additional Resources



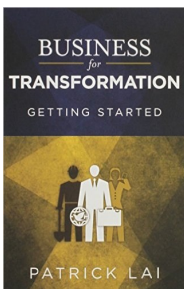
*A Better Way: Make Disciples  
Wherever Life Happens*

by Dale Losch



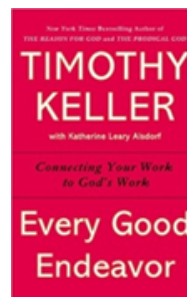
*Christ@Work: Opening Doors*

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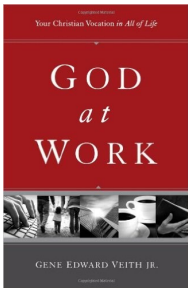


*Every Good Endeavor*

by Timothy Keller

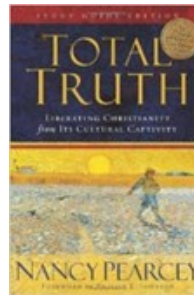


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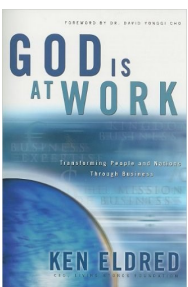
*God at Work*

by Gene Edward Veith, Jr.



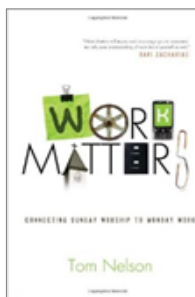
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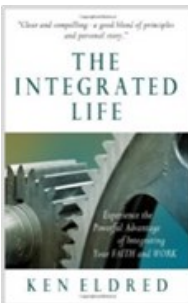
*God is at Work: Transforming People and Nations Through Business*

by Ken Eldred



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