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WISDOM AT WORK

A BIBLICAL APPROACH TO THE WORKPLACE

KENNETH
BOA &
GAIL
BURNETT



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I (Gail) cannot write about the workplace without thinking of my own career and of my personal appreciation for all those who have helped me along the way. Many thanks to Dr. Larry Zechman, Conard Stair, and Ken Sommerfeld, my first workplace encouragers. (How I wish I had been mature enough to have borne more fruit!) And special thanks to my patient attorney and dear friend, Jim Tipton, and to my much-loved mentor, Bob Hedrick.

AS YOU STUDY

Spiritual maturity begins with a diligent study of the Word of God. The more you take in and live out, the more you grow in Christlikeness. There's no substitute for spending time in the Word. Time, however, is a diminishing resource in our complex society; and schedules are rarely routine for anyone.

To help address these issues, Dr. Boa and I have developed what we call the **GUIDEBOOK** series. Guided tours carry people to places of interest, providing information from experts along the way. People take guided tours for a number of reasons. Sometimes they don't know where to go. Sometimes they want more information. Sometimes their time is limited. Sometimes their understanding is limited. In all cases, they need a guidebook.

The **GUIDEBOOK** series is aptly named. The workbooks are vehicles and we (your tour guides) are longtime Bible teachers and writers. Dr. Boa, in fact, is a theological expert. As we guide you through the themes of choosing our work, work and identity, work and wealth, and work and character, we'll be drawing your attention to key passages in Scripture. These passages are significant because of their relationship to something of greater importance; namely, God's plan of salvation.

To help you get the most out of your journey, read the suggestions in the adjacent column before you go on. We hope you'll enjoy *Wisdom at Work*. Now, buckle your seat belt. We're ready to go!

—Gail Burnett

GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR STUDY

1. **Begin with prayer.** You can gain information on your own, but only God can reveal truth.
2. **Do not read commentaries on this material until you have finished the entire study.** Self-discovery of biblical truth is exciting. It makes the Word of God come alive and also helps you retain what you've learned.
3. **Make sure you understand the structure of this **GUIDEBOOK** before you begin.** (Explanations are found on the following page.)
4. **Do not skip over directions to read the referenced Scriptures.** The text that follows may not make sense if you have not first read the Scripture passage(s).
5. **Be sure to write your answers to the study questions in the space provided.** Repetition and space for content interaction have been included to help you retain the material. Your answers will be confirmed in subsequent readings. These answers are intended to reinforce what you've already read and written.
6. **Work on this study every day of the week.** Begin the first day of your study week by reading the "unit introduction" page. Work through the Daily Excursions over the next five days, then end your week with review and Scripture memory. You may want to preview "Sharing the Journey" if you are using this study with a group.
7. **Read the articles and suggested Daily Readings in the optional Side Tours, even if you don't have time to do the activities.** The articles and readings are important, and they can be read in a few minutes.
8. **During your day, meditate on what you've learned.** Most Daily Excursions can be completed in less than twenty minutes, but they are "tightly packed." Reflecting on your observations allows biblical truths to expand your understanding and to take shape in your life.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDEBOOK

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN[©]

GUIDEBOOKS are self-contained, interactive Bible studies. These studies are primarily inductive; that is, they lead the reader to related Scriptures throughout the Bible so that he or she might experience the joy of self-discovery as revealed by the Master Himself. Therefore, in addition to Scripture references from the key texts, topics are supported by the whole counsel of God. Other outside material and additional Scripture references are included in “For further study.”

Each GUIDEBOOK includes five study units divided into five **Daily Excursions**. Most Excursions take about twenty minutes to complete. No additional reference materials are needed. To complete the optional Side Tours, a Bible and a concordance are sometimes needed.

PAGE DESCRIPTION

GUIDEBOOKS are designed for open, two-page viewing. Each page is divided into two columns—a wide inside column and a narrow outside column, as shown below. Daily Excursions include Bible teaching, related questions, life application (Bringing It Home), and Bible reading. The outside columns contain related Road Map and Side Tour options. At the end of each unit, it is suggested that the reader select one verse from the weekly reading to memorize.

The **Road Map** includes all Bible verses referred to in the Daily Excursions, except for

lengthy study texts. (These are provided in appendix A). Scriptures in the Road Map are linked to reference numbers in the Daily Excursions and numbered consecutively throughout the GUIDEBOOK. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture passages are from the *New American Standard Bible*, Updated Edition.

Within quoted Scriptures, ellipses (. . .) indicate where portions of text have been omitted (due to space constraints) without compromising the meaning. The verses provided include the essential information for your study; however, you will benefit from reading the full text from your Bible.

The **Side Tours** contain optional reading and Scripture references related to Language & Literature, History & Culture, Bible Study Techniques, Cross References, Scripture Meditation, and Points of Interest (including life illustrations). All Side Tours are referenced in the text and numbered consecutively (preceded by “T”) throughout the GUIDEBOOK. For example, the notation ^{T1} will follow the appropriate text in the Daily Excursion, and this same notation will appear in the adjacent Side Tour column. Because the Scriptures listed in Side Tours are not printed in this GUIDEBOOK, they must be looked up in a Bible.

Personal experiences of the authors are differentiated by their names in parentheses.

ROAD MAP	DAILY EXCURSION
<p>PROVERBS 1</p> <p>1. The proverbs (<i>mashal</i>) of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel.</p> <p>2. To know wisdom and instruction, to discern the sayings of understanding.</p> <p>3. To receive instruction in</p>	<p>DAY 1</p> <p>EXAMINING PROVERBS AS LITERATURE</p> <p>What defines a proverb? The Hebrew word for “proverb” is transliterated¹ <i>mashal</i>, which means “a discourse or a parable.” <i>Mashal</i> comes from a root word that means “to be similar or parallel; to represent; to be like or be compared to.” The book of Proverbs uses comparisons as</p>

DAILY EXCURSION	SIDE TOURS
<p>BRINGING IT HOME . . .</p> <p>1. Look back at your life—as a child, a teen, and a young adult. Also look at your life now. At what point, if any, did you make a choice to reject being naive and foolish and to embrace wisdom? In what ways does that choice still impact your life today?</p>	<p>HISTORY & CULTURE:^{T1}</p> <p>AUTHORSHIP—King Solomon, son of David, did not write all of the proverbs, but his work makes up the greater part of the book. Solomon was an observer and a seeker of knowledge. Not only was Solomon’s knowledge encyclopedic, his understanding and discernment were such that his</p>

INTRODUCTION—WISDOM AT WORK

There are, no doubt, more job titles in America than anyplace else in the world. We do all kinds of work—some we like and some we don't. And we have a tremendous vocabulary to describe our work. We Americans work like horses, work like dogs, and work like slaves. We work our fingers to the bone, keep our noses to the grindstone, and put our shoulders to the wheel. We pound away, plug along, and buckle down until we are overdriven, overtasked, overtaxed, and overburdened. For our arduous, onerous, and wearisome labors we receive hard-fought, hard-earned dollars—our reward for giving the sweat of our brow, with might and main, tooth and nail, heart and soul. We leave work fatigued, bone weary, worn out, used up, pooped, bushed, frazzled, spent, exhausted, and just plumb tuckered out.

This melodrama is quite amusing—and amazing, considering few of us even break a sweat in the course of our normal workday. Nevertheless, this small sampling of an

incredible number of work-related words, phrases, and idioms is an indicator of how important work is in our lives. This sampling also reveals how often we view our work in a negative light.

That we have many negative terms relating to our work is hardly surprising. Few people express real satisfaction with their jobs, regardless of their careers or professions. But because most of us will spend more than one hundred thousand hours in the workplace, it is in our best interest to examine work issues through the lens of God's Word. This is the reason we have written this study.

Wisdom at Work will guide you to Scriptures throughout the Bible that deal with work issues common to our experience. Our goal as teachers is to help you reexamine your work as a means of worship so that you might leverage your labor to the glory of God. May your workplace become an arena for your growth and His glory.

INTRODUCTION TO UNIT 1

WORK—IS IT PLEASURE OR PAIN?

Destination: To gain an understanding of work from a biblical perspective.

Before I began writing today, I (Gail) wanted to get a few chores out of the way. I made some calls, faxed materials to a Christian ministry, paid a bill, attended to a few housekeeping responsibilities, ran a couple of quick errands, and made lunch. When I sat down at the computer, I thought, *I'm already tired, and I haven't even started to work!*

Observing this scenario objectively, I realize, of course, that I had been working for several hours already. But, like most people in our Western culture, I tend to view “work” as synonymous with “job,” and “job” as synonymous with “the activity that provides my livelihood.” Only under someone else’s employment would I have thought of those administrative and domestic duties as “real” work (a notion that is particularly and rightly irksome to moms and homemakers).

Tasks that define work can be hard to pin down. One person sews for a clothing manufacturer, and that’s work. Another person sews for a hobby, so it’s leisure. One person chisels rock in a quarry, and that’s work. Another chisels stone in her basement, and it’s art. Even in income-producing environments, work can be a slippery concept. Suppose a man loves his job and finds great enjoyment and fulfillment in performing it. Is he working in the same way as another man who performs the same duties simply for financial survival and loathes every minute of it?

What exactly is work?¹ Is work a blessing or a curse? Do we want to work, or do we want work to just go away? Beyond basic provision, does work have any higher purpose, or is work simply a source of pain, a punishment inherited from Adam and Eve’s rebellion? In this GUIDEBOOK study, we’ll be looking at our work worlds from God’s perspective, using His Word to answer these and other important questions.

As you work through unit 1, you will unfold a multifaceted concept of work as presented in Scripture. If unit 1 seems a bit academic to you, just keep in mind that you are building an important foundation from which to more knowledgeably examine Scriptures on workplace issues.

As you begin this study, apply the exhortation from 2 Timothy 2:15: “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.”

¹ Scientists who study work issues use precise, technical definitions that make distinctions among work-related terms such as *job*, *task*, *occupation*, *profession*, *vocation*, and so on. In this study, however, we use these terms somewhat interchangeably, as in everyday speech.

¹DEUTERONOMY 26

6-7 The Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, and imposed hard labor [*abodah*] on us. Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil [*amal*] and our oppression.

DAY 1

WHAT IS WORK? (PART 1)

It seems strange to ask, “What is work?” Work, we may think, is simply a given, an inseparable component of both individual and community responsibility. Work is so commonplace in our lives that few of us spend time pondering its purpose, much less analyzing its impact on our lives and our culture. But our work is important—to us, to our society, and to God.

Social scientists tell us that there is a relationship between the importance of a cultural concept or issue and the number of words coined to describe it.¹¹ Certainly this is true of work in our society. Americans have coined a remarkable number of English words (including slang) that not only allow us to refer specifically to our work but also to simultaneously describe how we *feel* about it.

Below is a short list of work-related terms. Beside each of these terms, indicate with a plus (+) if the word resonates positively with you or a minus (-) if the word has a negative feel.

Work-Related Terms

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> accomplish | <input type="checkbox"/> administer | <input type="checkbox"/> build | <input type="checkbox"/> bring forth |
| <input type="checkbox"/> clean | <input type="checkbox"/> construct | <input type="checkbox"/> conduct | <input type="checkbox"/> craft |
| <input type="checkbox"/> create | <input type="checkbox"/> cultivate | <input type="checkbox"/> design | <input type="checkbox"/> develop |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fix | <input type="checkbox"/> grind | <input type="checkbox"/> labor | <input type="checkbox"/> maintain |
| <input type="checkbox"/> make | <input type="checkbox"/> minister | <input type="checkbox"/> operate | <input type="checkbox"/> organize |
| <input type="checkbox"/> oversee | <input type="checkbox"/> perform | <input type="checkbox"/> plod | <input type="checkbox"/> pound |
| <input type="checkbox"/> produce | <input type="checkbox"/> sell | <input type="checkbox"/> serve | <input type="checkbox"/> slave |
| <input type="checkbox"/> supervise | <input type="checkbox"/> toil | <input type="checkbox"/> weary | <input type="checkbox"/> work |

This tiny sampling of words that define or describe work is an indicator of how deeply work issues are woven into the fabric of our lives. Obviously, our work is important to us; nevertheless, we often refer to it negatively. Does anyone really enjoy his or her work? Do you enjoy the work involved in your primary job? Mark your own degree of personal satisfaction with your work experience using the Employment Enjoyment Scale that follows:

Employment Enjoyment Scale

- 1___ 2___ 3___ 4___ 5___ 6___ 7___ 8___ 9___ 10___
Miserable Very Enjoyable

“WORK” IN BIBLE LANGUAGES

Neither Hebrew and Aramaic (the languages of the Old Testament) nor Greek (the language of the New Testament) provide as many verbal tools for describing work activities as does English. Nevertheless, these languages offer enough words to make important differentiations among types of work activities. And shades of meaning are further discernible by the immediate context.^{T2}

Read Deuteronomy 26:6-7¹ from the Road Map column. Select some words from the list of work-related terms that best convey the apparent meaning of the following Hebrew words, based solely on the context.

abodah:

amal:

When describing these words, did you select more positive (+) or more negative (-) words?

What employment enjoyment score (from the scale on page 12) might you give to *abodah* and *amal*? _____

Abodah specifically refers to service or labor that is imposed or forced on a group, typically slaves. *Amal* means “heavy toil; labor that is associated with anguish or involves suffering.” In the *New American Standard Bible*, Updated Edition (used as the primary text in this course), *abodah* is translated “hard labor” and *amal* is translated “toil.”

There is no question that the type of effort described in these two Hebrew words constitutes real work. Both of these words convey not only physical labor but also labor in the harshest of terms.

As you conclude today’s study, think of contemporary activities that might be described by *abodah* or *amal*.

Would you include agricultural work as *abodah* or as *amal*? Why?

(Note: We will be looking at Adam’s agricultural work in this unit, so keep your answer in mind.)

LANGUAGE & LIT:^{T1}

ARE WE VERBALLY COLOR-BLIND?—Social scientists tell us that in every culture there is a relationship between the value of a concept and the number of words that are coined to distinguish among its features. People who live on tropical islands, for example, have more words to distinguish between various shades of blue than do people who live inland. Similarly, Eskimo languages have more words to distinguish between types of snow than does our English language. This is significant in each of those cultures because those subtle variations might signal to islanders or Eskimos that serious weather is in store.

That language reflects (or perhaps even defines) human perception is a fascinating concept. If such a correlation exists, we should consider those concepts that we claim to highly praise but have coined relatively few distinguishing synonyms or adjectives to describe. For example, how many synonyms do you know for “love”?

LANGUAGE & LIT:^{T2}

CONTEXT—Context is one of the key components to understanding a Scripture passage. The immediate context is determined by the way the words or sentences fit sensibly with the text surrounding it. Historical context refers to the broader issues that help determine the purpose of the writing. These include the author, the recipients, the time period, the culture, and so on. A Bible dictionary or Bible encyclopedia is a good place to find answers to questions concerning historical context. These are available at your local Christian bookstore, or perhaps in your church library.

² OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis 29:22 Laban gathered all the men of the place, and made [*asah*] a feast.

Genesis 31:1 From what belonged to our father he [Jacob] has made [*asah*] all this wealth.

Genesis 47:3 Pharaoh said . . . “What is your occupation [*maaseh*]?” So they said to Pharaoh, “Your servants are shepherds.”

Exodus 20:11 In six days the LORD made [*asah*] the heavens and the earth.

Exodus 28:6 They shall also make [*asah*] the ephod of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen, the work [*maaseh*] of the skillful workman.

1 Chronicles 5:10 In the days of Saul they made [*asah*] war with the Hagarites.

Psalms 102:25 Of old You founded the earth, And the heavens are the work [*maaseh*] of Your hands.

³ NEW TESTAMENT

Luke 5:5 Simon answered and said, “Master, we worked hard [*kopiaio*] all night and caught nothing.”

John 4:34 Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work [*ergon*].”

John 9:4 “We must work [*ergazomai*] the works [*ergon*] of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no man can work [*ergazomai*].”

Ephesians 4:11-12 He gave some as apostles . . . evangelists, and . . . pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work [*ergon*] of service. . . .

Ephesians 4:28 He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor [*ergazomai*], performing with his own hands what is good. . . .

DAY 2

WHAT IS WORK? (PART 2)

On day 1 we discussed the large number of English words that define various types of work and work-related ideas. We also looked at two Hebrew words that identified work involving heavy toil, forced labor, and anguish.

In today’s session, we want to look at two more Hebrew words for “work”—*asah* and its derivative *maaseh*. Read the selected excerpts from the Old Testament.² As in our last excursion, use words from the list of work-related terms (page 12) that seem to most closely convey what these Hebrew words mean, based solely on the context.

asah:

maaseh:

Do these terms for work seem more appealing than *amal* and *abodah*? On average, how would you score the enjoyment potential of *asah* and *maaseh*? ____

Asah refers to work that makes, produces, builds, or creates something—from books to banquets to battles. *Asah* means “to take action; to accomplish; to bring forth.” The word is also used of people’s response to God’s commands, and it applies specifically to *all* His acts and actions.

Maaseh (derived from *asah*) refers to the finished product of the worker, that is, to his achievements. *Melakah*, a synonym of *maaseh*, is probably the Hebrew word closest in meaning to the English words “job,” “occupation,” and “vocation.”

There are several other Hebrew words for “work,” but these four—*amal* and *abodah* (from yesterday’s study) plus *asah* and its derivative *maaseh*—are the most frequently used words for “work” in the Old Testament.

GREEK WORDS FOR “WORK”

In Greek, the most frequently used words for “work” are *kopiaio* and *ergon* (in their various forms). Read the excerpts of New Testament references³ and determine from the context which words in the list of work-related terms (page 12) most closely define *kopiaio*.

kopiao:

What is the Hebrew equivalent of *kopiao*?

Kopiao means “hard labor; weariness; toil.” It comes from the root word *kopos*, which means “trouble and misery.” Bilingual Jews who translated the Old Testament into Greek (284–247 B.C.)^{T3} selected the word *kopiao* as the Greek substitute for the Hebrew word *amal*.

The second primary Greek word that is translated “work,” *ergon* (and its noun form *ergazomai*) means “work, deeds, or business activities that are directed toward a goal.” *Ergon*’s meaning most closely parallels the Hebrew words *asah* and *maaseh*.

Why have we looked so intently at word meanings? First, if we’re going to be looking at work from God’s perspective, then we have to let Scripture (not the English dictionary) define our terms. Second, we must examine key words and their root words from their language of origin (rather than from an English translation) to gain insight into their fuller meaning.^{T4} From the meaning of *ergon* we now know, for example, that work will expend energy. We know from both *asah* and *ergon* that the energy of work must be directed toward some goal, task, or performance. We also know from the definitions of *kopiao*, *amal*, and *abodah* that some kinds of work will be forced labor and will involve suffering or anguish.

BRINGING IT HOME

1. The studies on days 1 and 2 have probably seemed a bit technical. The purpose of these exercises, however, is to free you from culturally imposed, twentieth-century work concepts and to help you better understand work issues from Scripture.

Choose five words from the work-related terms on page 12 that best describe your own job. Are these words more positive (+), more negative (-), or neutral? Compare these descriptions with the score you gave on the Employment Enjoyment Scale, page 12. Are the two in agreement? Why or why not? Ask God to open up your understanding so that you might get a new perspective on the meaning of work.

HISTORY & CULTURE:^{T3}

THE SEPTUAGINT—The books of the Old Testament were written over a long period of time. Some of the books may have been collected under the reign of King Solomon (970–930 B.C.). Other books were added as the people of Israel experienced and documented great blessings or great trouble. Among the crises brought on by national corruption, as revealed in the books of the prophets, were the conquests of Israel by other nations and the resulting dispersion of the Jews into other lands.

By the time Rome conquered the Greeks, Jews were scattered throughout the empire. Most spoke Greek, and all but a few had forgotten the ancient Hebrew language. From 284–247 B.C., a few bilingual Jews translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. This Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint, established the order of the thirty-nine Old Testament books as we use them today. The Septuagint also contains other Jewish writings often referred to as the Apocrypha. As these writings were not part of the original books of Scripture, however, they are not included in the sacred canon of the Old Testament.

STUDY TECHNIQUES:^{T4}

WORD STUDIES—Language is dynamic; that is, it evolves to reflect new developments in the culture. The noun *computer*, for example, evolved from the verb “to compute,” reflecting the mathematical process of a computer’s operating system.

When we study Scripture, we always look up the “root” words from which other words are derived. Finding the meanings of words of origin greatly expands our understanding of Scripture.

DAY 3

WORK AS GOD INTENDED IT

⁴GENESIS 3

17-19 Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you will eat bread.

⁵GENESIS 1 & 2

1:31 God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.

2:9 Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food.

⁶ISAIAH 51

3 Indeed, the LORD will comfort Zion. . . . And her wilderness He will make like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and sound of a melody.

⁷GENESIS 2

4-9,¹⁵ This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created. . . . Now no shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the LORD God had not sent rain upon the earth; and there was no man to cultivate the ground. . . . Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden. . . . Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.

The purpose of work is the subject of much debate by thinkers in various fields, from sociology to economics to theology. Many Christians (and some non-Christians) think that work is the punishment we all inherited as a result of Adam's sin. We'll examine this idea more closely in today's study. Begin by quickly scanning Genesis 1-3 from appendix A.

Now let's analyze some of these selected verses. From the Road Map column, read about God's response to Adam's sin from Genesis 3:17-19.⁴ Specifically, what was cursed as a result of Adam's disobedience?

How was this curse to be manifested?

Let's back up a bit. From the description of the curse, what conclusions might be drawn about the garden prior to Adam and Eve's rebellion?

From nothing tangible, God created "stuff," including a garden that must have been lavish. The Garden of Eden is often referred to as a place of perfection, though Genesis doesn't say so explicitly. How, then, do we know? Read the verses from Genesis 1 and 2⁵ in the Road Map column. How did God characterize all that He had made?

Part of our understanding of perfection comes from knowing that God's work is always perfect. Also, the meaning of the Hebrew word for "good" (*tob*) paints a clearer picture of perfection than does the English translation. *Tob* means "abundantly pleasant; exceedingly pleasing." *Tob* is also translated "beautiful, charming, cheerful, delightful, safe, sound, worthy."

We have glimpses into Eden from other Scriptures as well.¹⁵ Genesis 13:10, for example, tells us the garden of the Lord was well watered. From Ezekiel 31:8 and 28:13 we learn that Eden contained cedars, cypresses, and plane trees as well as an abundance of precious stones.

God's garden was more than just physically beautiful. Read Isaiah 51:3.⁶ From the comparisons provided by this verse, what do we learn about Eden's atmosphere? Draw a symbol that, for you, conveys the mood that must have existed in the Garden of Eden.

Now, read of God's plan and provision for Adam in Genesis 2:4-9,15.⁷ What was Adam's responsibility in the Garden of Eden? Was this before or after he sinned?

Adam and Eve lived in a beautiful environment that fostered a sense of well-being. We can rightly conclude, therefore, that Eden knew no *amal* or *abodah*—no heavy toil, no slavery, no frustration. Nevertheless, from the beginning God had designed a garden that would be dependent upon a steward. In that design, He created a job for Adam before He created Adam himself. Why do you think God did this? Check the reason that you think comes closest to the truth.

- ___ God couldn't keep the garden Himself.
- ___ God wanted to create busy work for Adam.
- ___ God knew work would be fulfilling for Adam.

Adam and Eve's assignments were to take the earth's raw materials and begin nurturing, organizing, and shaping them into something useful—a creative task intended to give each of them purpose and pleasure. Read Isaiah 28:23-26.⁸ How did Adam learn his job skills? That is, how did he know how to cultivate and care for God's garden?

Review the Scriptures relating to God's garden at Creation and His initial plans for humanity. Do you think Adam's assignments before the curse constituted "real" work? If not, why not? If so, was it *asah* or *amal*?

Your answer probably relates to your own definition of work. And, as we mentioned in the introduction, work can be difficult to define.

STUDY TECHNIQUES:^{T5}

CROSS-REFERENCING—When studying a topic in the Bible, we want to find the full counsel of God before taking a theological position. We accomplish this in a couple of different ways.

Most Bibles have cross-reference notations directly in the text. These superscript letters or numbers are keyed to a matching letter or number located in the small column that (in most cases) runs either down the inside margin of each page or the center of the page. Notations here identify other passages in Scripture where the subject is also discussed.

While these cross-references are helpful, they are usually not exhaustive. A more thorough study can be accomplished with a concordance (see "Language & Lit: More on Word Studies," page 21). When looking up a topic in a concordance, be sure to include synonyms.

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Look for a Scripture passage at the end of each Daily Excursion. Meditate on this Scripture throughout your day, asking yourself, *How does this passage apply to my work life?* Consider memorizing the verses of your Scripture Meditation.

Here's today's Scripture Meditation: "I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:12-13).

⁸ISAIAH 28

23-26 Give ear and hear my voice, listen and hear my words. Does the farmer plow continually to plant seed? Does he continually turn and harrow the ground? Does he not level its surface, and sow dill and scatter cummin, and plant wheat in rows, barley in its place, and rye within its area? For his God instructs and teaches him properly.

⁹GENESIS 1

26-28 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Let's assume for the moment that "work" is synonymous with "job." What elements do you think would be necessary to make one's work pleasurable or enjoyable? Briefly note your ideas of the "perfect" job as you, personally, would envision it.

In the Garden of Eden, both Adam and Eve held power positions. They could order and shape their own world and, in doing so, both subdue and serve it. Adam and Eve's work had meaning—theirs were not irrelevant tasks. Both were trained in horticulture and animal husbandry by the Head of the universe; they received from Him all the knowledge, wisdom, and strength they needed to carry out their duties with full vigor and confidence. And both enjoyed unlimited opportunities for creative expression.

In addition, the earth and all it contained were subject to Adam and Eve's authority. They served as vicegerents (managing rulers), administering duties under the Great King. And their compensation was all the fullness of a lush and bountiful land. Based on this description, would you consider Adam and Eve's job a blessing or a curse? Why?

Most of us think a job like Adam's would be *heavenly*—and we'd be right! There was something heavenly not only about the job but also about Adam and Eve themselves. Read Genesis 1:26-28.⁹ Who served as the model for humankind at Creation? For which gender?

Both Adam and Eve reflected the image of their Creator; thus they shared some of His attributes. Read Genesis 1:26-28 again. Select single verbs that describe God's work and Adam and Eve's duties and write them below:

God's Work

Adam & Eve's Duties

God worked by speaking, making, creating, and blessing His creation. Check each word on the next page that might describe God's motivation to work (to create the cosmos and man).

ROAD MAP

DAILY EXCURSION

__coercion __*asah* __drudgery __voluntary
__satisfaction __*amal* __joy __self-expression

Adam and Eve were told to “be,” “fill,” “rule,” and “subdue.” Go back and circle each word in the previous list that describes what you think might have motivated Adam to do the work God initially had given him.

If we understand that God delighted in His creative work and that He created human beings to share in His image and likeness, then we realize that work was a marvelous gift from God. It is reasonable to believe—indeed, it is hard *not* to believe—that work was given *before the Fall* to meet the human need for purpose and creative expression, and that is a need that goes far deeper than mere self-preservation.

The desire to work, then, was ignited by a divine spark that drew both Adam and Eve into creative activities. Nothing else they could do would reflect the image of their Creator more than this for, even today, it is human creativity that sets men and women apart from every other living thing on this planet.^{T6}

BRINGING IT HOME

1. Close your eyes for a moment and try to imagine one day of total freedom from work (remember to include all creative activities as well as all unpleasant tasks). If the idea appeals to you, also imagine someone else doing even your personal chores—fixing your hair, changing your TV channels, reading your paper. Now, multiply that day into a week and that week into months and years of nonproductive activity. Do these thoughts elicit any emotional response? What is it?
2. Based on the things you’ve learned so far, write a biblical definition of work. As you work at your job this week, pay attention to elements of your work that reflect your definition. (Be prepared to modify your definition as you proceed through this study.)

POINT OF INTEREST:^{T6}

CREATIVE DIRECTOR—“Do you know where cars come from?” my young grandson, Haden, asked.

“Well, not exactly,” I (Gail) answered truthfully. “Do you?”

“Yes,” he said in his most authoritative voice. “God made ‘em.”

I stammered before I began the not-so-easy task of explaining to a five year old the difference between what God has made and what people have recycled.

“Yes, God made the raw materials,” I began. “God made rocks in the ground with iron in them. People dig out the rocks, melt out the iron, mix it with something called carbon, and make steel.

That’s the metal that’s shaped into a car. God made pockets of oil and natural gas in the earth. People tap into these pockets and make fuel to run the cars. God also made rubber trees and fibrous plants. People harvest them to make tires. And God puts the knowledge of how to make all those things in our minds.

“So really, Haden,” I concluded, “a car is made by God working with and through people. So when *you* make something from God’s raw materials, God will be working with you, too, as your Partner.”

Haden’s eyes widened as the idea of God’s partnership penetrated his thoughts. But in the telling I, too, was gripped by the truth that the almighty God is Himself working with us and in us and through us, mentoring us, being our partner, and guiding the work of our hands. No wonder He tells us to come to Him in awe and wonder—just like a child.

DAY 4

THE CURSE AND THE NATURE OF WORK

¹⁰ GENESIS 5

29 He [Lamech] called his name Noah, saying, "This one shall give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the LORD has cursed."

¹¹ ROMANS 8

19-22 The anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.

¹² ECCLESIASTES 2

17-19 I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind. Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor . . . under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool?

¹³ 2 PETER 3

10 The day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

Work was meant to be a perpetual source of fascination and blessing for Adam and Eve. Sin, however, changed the nature of work because God's curse changed the nature of nature. We saw in Genesis 3:17-19⁴ that the ground (*adamah*) was cursed because of Adam's sin. Read Genesis 5:29¹⁰ and Romans 8:19-22.¹¹ Check the phrase that best describes the extent of the curse, according to these verses.

- Confined to the Garden of Eden
- Encompassing the whole earth
- Encompassing the entire cosmos
- Confined to Adam's personal garden

To what was all of creation enslaved?

According to Romans 8, the entire cosmos was enslaved to corruption, and it continues to groan in anguish over its own condition. Why do you think the whole earth had to be cursed when humankind was cursed?

Fallen humanity could not retain dominion over an otherwise perfect creation. When Adam was evicted from God's garden, he immediately began to experience the human conflict with an unruly, unresponsive world. The curse changed Adam's environment from a place of safety, security, and satisfying work to a place most uncooperative and sometimes hostile. In a corrupted environment, then, Adam's work became difficult, frustrating, even frightening.

WORK WITHOUT ETERNAL PURPOSE

Read Romans 8:19-22 again. To what was creation unwillingly subjected?

The Greek word for "futility" is *mataios*, from the root word *mate*, meaning "in vain, to no purpose, empty." As a purposeful and useful creation was subjected to futility, so was the work of people's hands. Read Ecclesiastes 2:17-19.¹² How did the writer (King Solomon) express his frustration with the results of his labors "under the sun"?

Solomon used the Hebrew word *hebel* to describe his work. *Hebel* is a primitive root word meaning “vapor, mere breath, empty, and delusionary.”^{T7}

Perhaps Solomon had noticed creation’s entropy (the natural, continual degrading of all matter and energy in the universe). Everything on earth deteriorates, and we expend much energy just trying to slow the natural degradation. Yet we never make any real headway. True preservation is a delusion. To what, for example, will each of the following items eventually succumb?

cars:

houses:

grounds:

people:

Entropy affects everything. Whole careers, in fact, are maintenance-based. List some that come to mind.

From plastic surgeons to painters to pothole fillers, a surprising number of careers involve simply slowing the deterioration of people and things.

In addition to entropy, chaos rules in our corrupted world, both at home and at work.^{T8} At home we can pick up our rooms or straighten our desks, but both will become disordered again with no real effort at all. At work we fight chaos in everything we do, from product design to production. Even people in creative jobs (commissioned artists or researchers) are not immune. And chaos especially reigns in human interactions. It takes a great deal of energy and effort to keep our relationships in order; just as it requires energy to prevent chaos in the world at large.

WORK IN A WAR ZONE

We mentioned earlier that sometimes our environment is resistant to the point of being hostile and frightening. List some elements of creation that pose danger and resist human efforts to manage or subdue them.

LANGUAGE & LIT:^{T7}

MORE ON WORD STUDIES—In Bible study, we look up words in their languages of origin because it is helpful to glean the meanings from the culture in which the text was written. As we trace the definitions of the words (with their root words) and examine the tenses of the verbs, we are often enlightened and sometimes surprised.

The languages of origin for the Old Testament are Hebrew and Aramaic. The language of origin for the New Testament is Greek. None of these languages uses any form of the English alphabet. The only way to write them down, therefore, is to listen to the sound of the Hebrew or Greek word and then phonetically spell out those sounds with the English alphabet. This process is called transliteration.

There are a number of books, study Bibles, and computer programs that make word studies a simple process. One inexpensive tool is a concordance.

If you buy a concordance, be sure it corresponds to the version of the Bible you are using. Some of the most common translations are the *King James Version* (KJV), with several revised editions, the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB), and the *New International Version* (NIV). You will find a concordance available for each of these translations.

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:14-17)

¹⁴ **1 PETER 1**

17-19 If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.

23 For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.

¹⁵ **DEUTERONOMY 7**

6-8 The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out [of Egypt] by a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery.

¹⁶ **ROMANS 6 & 7**

6:17-18 Thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart . . . , and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

7:14 We know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.

Dangers and problems abound in our natural world—weather conditions, earthquakes, floods, erosion, rough terrain, drought, insects, poisonous plants, dangerous animals, extremes in temperatures, deadly bacteria and diseases—the list goes on. Nevertheless, humankind has retained divinely appointed stewardship over God's created order, and our role in the earth's preservation and reproduction continues. Sin, however, has robbed each of us of the peace as well as the perpetual joy of *asah*—of making, producing, designing, and working as a subcreator in a cosmos that once welcomed us and yielded willingly to our control.

WHY BOTHER WITH WORK?

King Solomon wrestled with the sheer futility of working to acquire things that he couldn't take with him. Solomon also wrestled with the fact that he had no control over the one who would inherit the work of his hands. "What," Solomon asked in exasperation, "is the point?"

The apostle Peter takes this question to its ultimate conclusion. Read 2 Peter 3:10.¹³ What will eventually happen to all of our achievements?

At the end of the ages, everything we've given our lives to develop, create, collect, invent, build, manage, or organize will be burned up. Not one of earth's treasures that we've craved or caressed will survive the consummation of the ages. Even our earth suits will be lost to the intense heat. But 1 Peter 1:17-19,23¹⁴ offers hope. To whom?

According to 1 Peter 1:23,¹⁴ what is the medium through which one becomes born again?

The Word of God, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, is a living and *enduring* message. It points to God's plan for "redeeming" us from this condemned cosmos through a process of rebirth. Redemption is an interesting concept. Read Deuteronomy 7:6-8.¹⁵ From what were God's people redeemed?

In both Hebrew (*padah*) and Greek (*lutroo*), "to redeem" means "to gain release by paying a ransom." A ransom is the exchange price for something so valuable that the purchaser is willing to rescue, at any cost, what already belongs to him

or her. Deuteronomy 7:6-8 speaks of God's redeeming (paying a ransom for) His own people to buy them back from slavery because He loved them and because He keeps His covenant promises.

God's people were in bondage in Egypt. Their physical bondage, however, was but a type or foreshadowing of what would one day be revealed about their spiritual condition in the preaching of the gospel.¹⁹ Read excerpts from Romans 6 and 7.¹⁶ To what is everyone enslaved from birth?

Adam and Eve gave us quite an inheritance—a sin nature that enslaves us to Satan and condemns us to destruction! Our sin nature also put upon God the heavy onus of either leaving us to perish without hope or paying an unfathomable ransom price that we might be saved. Review 1 Peter 1:17-19,23.¹⁴ With what ransom price were we made imperishable?

The apostle John tells us that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but will have eternal life (see John 3:16). Do you believe in Jesus and desire to obey God?

BRINGING IT HOME

1. Spend some time today thinking on the issue of your own slavery to sin and the price God paid to redeem or ransom you. Write God a thank-you note.
2. As you go about your work this week, pay attention to the things that go wrong. Note whether they went wrong from poor planning or from forces over which you had no control (such as weather, office politics, traffic jams, failed equipment, and so on). Pray before starting any new projects this week, asking God to minimize any impending chaos. Briefly note your progress on your daily calendar.

POINT OF INTEREST:^{T8}

AN IRRESISTIBLE FORCE—

We've all experienced resistance when trying to do a simple household repair. More often than not, a small task will turn into a massive project. You'll find you have the wrong socket or you can't get the nail to go through. You'll begin to fix some surface problem, only to find that the whole foundation is rotten. We've learned by experience not to be too optimistic about the ease with which our work will be completed. In fact, the phenomenon that "anything that can go wrong, will" is so common that we've given it a name—Murphy's Law.

Paul tells in the book of Romans that creation itself is frustrated by its own corruption. Along with humankind, it is waiting to be redeemed. Someday this cosmos will be restored to a higher order. To get a glimpse of the new heaven and the new earth, read the last two chapters of Revelation. Compare what you read in Revelation with the first three chapters of Genesis. Both are listed in appendix A.

LANGUAGE & LIT:^{T9}

OLD TESTAMENT SYMBOLISM—

We should read the Bible with this question in mind: *What does this say about redemption?* Old Testament characters and events were usually pictures that represented what would someday be a spiritual reality, namely, Jesus Christ and His redemptive work.

There is tremendous symbolism in the story of the Exodus. Egypt is a picture of bondage to sin, Moses is a picture (or type) of Christ the Redeemer, and the Promised Land is a picture of heaven. These life pictures "cast a forward shadow" of God's salvation plan.

DAY 5

HOPE FOR REDEEMING OUR WORK

¹⁷ **PSALM 90**

16-17 Let Your work appear to Your servants, and Your majesty to their children. . . . And confirm for us the work of our hands; yes, confirm the work of our hands.

¹⁸ **JOB 1**

10 Have You not made a hedge about him [Job] . . . , on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.

¹⁹ **DEUTERONOMY 16**

11-12,15 You shall rejoice before the LORD your God. . . . You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes. . . . Seven days you shall celebrate a feast to the LORD your God . . . , because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful.

²⁰ **ECCLESIASTES 5**

6 Do not let your speech cause you to sin. . . . Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands?

²¹ **HAGGAI 2**

14,17 “So is this nation before Me,” declares the LORD, “and . . . what they offer there is unclean. . . . [So] I smote you and every work of your hands with blasting wind, mildew and hail; yet you did not come back to Me,” declares the LORD.

²² **DEUTERONOMY 28**

11-13 (see page 00)

We learned on day 3 that God intended for our work to provide us with purpose and pleasure. On day 4, however, we saw that our work arena is a badly corrupted environment where entropy, chaos, and sin reign. Moreover, our world is destined to total destruction; ultimately, our works will be exposed to its consuming fire. Do these truths affect your motivation to work? If so, how?

The temporal nature of our efforts is bothersome to many of us, for preserving “things” is a way of leaving a legacy or a marker of our own existence. The ancients built castles, great walls, and pyramids as lasting memorials to themselves. Today we build bridges and buildings for much the same reason. The desire to create with purpose and permanence is inherent in our human nature.^{T10} It even shows up in Scripture. Read Psalm 90:16-17.¹⁷ What does the psalmist ask of God?

In the midst of a cursed environment, the psalmist is asking God to give the people lasting fruit for their labors. Because God Himself cursed the earth, is this prayer consistent with His intentions? What insights do you see from Job 1:10¹⁸ and Deuteronomy 16:11-12,15?¹⁸

Because of its corruption, our world will always frustrate our work efforts to the point that neither our work nor our workplace will run smoothly for very long. On the other hand, God still desires for our work to be not only a source of material and financial rewards (temporal value), but also a purposeful and deeply satisfying source of joy! Work concerns not only the product of our labor (this should be done with excellence as unto the Lord), but also the process of our labor (the focus of our hearts).

These parallel realities explain the dual nature of work and help us understand why we have such a love-hate relationship with it. Work is, and will always be, a source of both pleasure and pain. We must learn to live with the tension between these two extremes. If you could divide into

percentages the pleasure and pain of your average workday (for a total of 100 percent), how would the numbers come out?

Pain: ____ Neutral: ____ Pleasure: ____

Hopefully, your neutral plus pleasure percentages outscore your percent of frustration or pain. If your pain level is higher, you may be in the wrong job or field, may be working with difficult people, or may simply be in a trial of your faith. It's possible, however, that the cause of your frustration and dissatisfaction from work comes from having goals that are not aligned with God's plans and purposes. Compare Job 1:10¹⁸ and Deuteronomy 16:11-12,15¹⁹ with Ecclesiastes 5:6²⁰ and Haggai 2:14,17.²¹

From the verses in Ecclesiastes and Haggai, what would you say was keeping God from blessing the people's work efforts?

According to Deuteronomy 28:11-13,²² what releases God to bless human labor?

Whether it's a nail we can't hammer into place or a proposal that fails to secure a contract, few things rankle us like failing to reap the fruit of our labors. Yet, according to these verses, God Himself intentionally frustrates our efforts at times. He will probe this "tender spot" to bring us to obedience or to turn our attention toward working for things that matter.

WHAT "THINGS" MATTER TO GOD?

How do we know what matters to God? Go back and review 2 Peter 3:10¹³ from yesterday's study. What is destined for destruction, and whose created works are thereby affected?

What, then, is the eternal value of the cosmos?

If much of God's own works are destined for destruction, how much more the works of our hands! And God intends to rescue very little from the ultimate demise of His

POINT OF INTEREST:^{T10}
TEMPORAL VALUE VERSUS ETERNAL VALUE—While the products of our hands have no eternal value, they may have temporal value, especially as we create or operate in ways that improve the quality of life for others. But even altruistic work cannot by itself satisfy our longing for purpose and meaning, nor can it provide us with an inner sense of achievement.

After fifty-seven years of political work in England, Leonard Wolfe, a well-known author, said, "Meditating on the history of Britain and the world since 1914, I see clearly that I achieved practically nothing. I have, therefore, to make the rather ignominious confession to myself and to anyone who may read this book that I must have in a long life ground through between 150,000 and 200,000 hours of perfectly useless work."

If we're honest, most of us have to admit that, even when our work is extraordinarily complex, it amounts (in the larger scheme of things) to little more than a steady stream of relatively meaningless activities. The significance and sense of purpose we so deeply long for in our work will never be found, except in its connection to the purposes of God. Ironically, we fulfill His purposes by living out the Christian life in the workplace, where we do our best to produce something of temporal value with our hands.

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8-9)

²³ MATTHEW 24

35 “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away.”

²⁴ JOHN 5

17,19-20 [Jesus] answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working. . . . Truly, truly, I say to you, . . . whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing.”

²⁵ JOHN 6

27-29 [Jesus said,] “Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you. . . .” Therefore they said to Him, “What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered . . . , “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”

²⁶ JOHN 4

34 Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.”

²⁷ 1 CORINTHIANS 3

11-15 No man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

own created order—actually, only two things will be made imperishable. These treasures are mentioned in Matthew 24:35²³ and 1 Peter 1:17-19,23.¹⁴ What are they?

As we learned in day 4, the Father values us beyond our understanding, and He provided for us a way of redemption, paying as the ransom price the blood of His own Son. He also values His Word and will redeem it in the day of destruction. If our work efforts are to have any redeeming value, then they must contribute in some way to God’s agenda, that is, to preserving the things that He values.^{T11}

THE WORKING MODEL

We come to understand God’s agenda through His Word. Read John 5:17,19-20²⁴ and list the workers.

How does the Son know what to do?

Note the present tense—the Father and the Son *are* working and have been working right up through the present moment. As Jesus looked to God the Father for training and instruction, so also must we look to Jesus as our role model for doing the works (*ergon*) of God. Read John 6:27-29.²⁵ What is the basic and essential work of God, and for what should we work?

The Father instructs us to believe in the Son, and the Son instructs us to work for “food” that endures. Read John 4:34.²⁶ How does Jesus define that “food”?

Let’s add one more Scripture before we conclude this day’s study. Compare 2 Peter 3:10¹³ and 1 Corinthians 3:11-15.²⁷ What do these Scriptures have in common?

According to 1 Corinthians 3:11-15, what works will pass the fire test? On what must they be built?

The apostle Paul (the writer of the letters to the Corinthians) compares the works of things that will easily burn and are of little value to things that are imperishable and priceless.

All of our works will indeed be tried by fire. Those works that have only temporal value will be destroyed. But those works that have been built on the foundation that Jesus Christ has already laid will go with us into eternity because they have contributed to the kingdom of our Lord.

Our goal over the remainder of this course is to look at the ways we can approach our work with purpose so that we might produce those priceless things that will remain.

BRINGING IT HOME

1. Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (John 5:24). Does the way you live your life and approach your work reflect that you (1) believe in God’s promise of eternal life and (2) are confident that you will be rewarded for works that achieve His goals? If so, thank God for His master plan and ask Him to increase your awareness of His goals as you go about your workday. If not, do you really believe in the One whom God has sent? Write down your thoughts.
2. Look at the percentage points you gave to pain on page 25. Write down three changes that you think would reduce the frustration of your work situation. If any of these are changes within your control, implement one of them this week. If they are not, ask God to either remove the stress area or to show you how to deal more effectively with the painful situation(s).

POINT OF INTEREST:^{T11}

THE WORTH OF WORK—If we stopped to evaluate work from an eternal perspective, we’d see how absolutely upside-down our value system really is. If asked who is most productive, we’d probably look to the man who has spent his life neglecting his family, steam-rolling relationships, using people to get ahead, and gaining position, power, and a large bucket of “mammon,” all of which is destined to perish. At the same time, we would overlook the woman who decided to work at home and care for her children. In fact, such women are sometimes looked down upon. Yet mothers play a tremendous role in shaping young lives, who not only will contribute to society someday but will also live eternally!

We have a skewed mentality. There’s nothing unbiblical about a woman working outside the home. But the point is, our culture de-means an extremely important job: raising children in the discipline and admonition of the Lord. We must recognize that this effort is primary for the health and well-being of our society as well as for the advancing of the kingdom of God.

We need to reexamine our yardsticks and value those who cultivate people rather than those who accumulate wealth, power, and position.

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:14-17)

SHARING THE JOURNEY

To the leader: You will need a flipchart or other large sheet of paper for the Hebrew and Greek word definitions in the first two activities.

1. The English language uses a variety of words to describe work, and these words give us some insight into our society's attitudes toward work. However, if we want to get God's perspective on work, we have to look at biblical terms for it.
 - Complete this sentence: "When I think about my work, I feel . . ."
 - Using a flipchart or other large sheet of paper, write your own definitions for the Hebrew words *abodah* and *amal*.
2. In addition to *abodah* and *amal*, a couple of other words in biblical Hebrew describe work. Likewise, New Testament Greek provides a pair of relevant terms for our study.
 - Complete the list of definitions started in activity 1 by writing your own definitions of *asah*, *maaseh*, *kopiao*, and *ergon*. (You may wish to keep this list of words around for reference throughout your study of work.)
 - Which of the definitions on the list comes closest to describing your own experiences with work? Why?
3. God is the Creator, and that means He is a worker. Furthermore, even before the Fall, God gave work assignments to Adam and Eve as a way to meet the human need for purpose and creative expression. Our first ancestors' experience of work was productive and joyful.
 - What words or phrases would you use to describe God's work in creating and sustaining the universe?
 - Pretend that you are Adam or Eve and that you have just come home in the evening. Your spouse says, "Hi, honey. How was your day?" Describe what your workday was like. (If you're a bit of a ham, you might even want to pair up with another member of the group and do this as an improvisational skit.)
 - What evidences do you see that work today still fulfills the human need for purpose and creative expression?
4. After their sin, Adam and Eve's relationship to work changed dramatically—and for the worse. Since then, the situation hasn't changed much. We retain the role of stewards over God's created order, but our work is plagued by difficulty, frustration, and even futility. All this reminds us that we need a Savior.
 - What are some of the negative aspects of work as we experience it today? What's the connection between these things and sin?
 - Do you ever get the sense that the services you provide or the goods you produce in your work are ultimately meaningless? If so, why?
 - Take a few moments to write a prayer expressing to God how you feel about the redemption of sinners through the blood of Jesus. (Note: If you haven't yet been redeemed, or if you aren't sure about it, please speak with a spiritually mature Christian about your need.)
5. Despite the effects of sin, God still wants our work to meet our material needs and to give us pleasure. What He's concerned about most, however, is *how* we do our work, not *what* we do, for if we do our work in a way that's consistent with eternal values, it will not go to waste.
 - Would you say that you have a love-hate relationship with your work? Why?
 - Is your work aligned with the purposes of God? Explain why you think it is or is not.
 - Do you believe there was a time in your life when God intentionally frustrated your work efforts in order to get your attention and pull you back on track? If so, tell about it.
 - How can your work contribute to the building up of the kingdom of God?

Close the group time with a prayer asking God to help each member of the group do his or her work in a way that contributes to the building up of His kingdom. Thank Him for the redemption He provided at the cost of His Son's life so that we would not have to lead lives that end up being consumed in fire.