

A Biblical Perspective of Work

Good Morning Mercy Hill.

For those that I have not met yet, my name is Bob Durstenfeld, my wife Becky and I serve as the leaders of the Go! Team, or Global Outreach team. We have been at Mercy Hill for just over four years.

This morning I would like to share a part of my spiritual and professional journey. Like most of you, I would get up in the morning, have some breakfast and head to work or school. But this always bothered me, why **WORK**? We all have to work, whether that is as a mom, a student, employee or self-employed. What would happen if we didn't? Would all chaos ensue? I know, our houses would be messy, we wouldn't know how to read and we certainly would not have the technology that we all depend on or the food we like to eat.

I moved to Silicon Valley in 1978 to WORK, I was motivated and excited to move here for employment after college. It seemed like the right thing to do. I studied electrical engineering and solid state physics, and in 1978, this was a happening place for electrical engineers that understood how semiconductors worked. But it wasn't always easy and it certainly wasn't always fun. Some work is tedious, some exhausting, some is just plain hard.

For many of us, WORK is a dirty four-letter word, like those that we choose not to say in public.

I wondered, what does God have to say about work, what should our Biblical perspective be? What are the Biblical implications for our lives and our relationship with God? How do we keep our heart in the work set before us?

Maybe you already have an answer for this, but I ask that you indulge me for the next few minutes as we explore what the Bible has to say on the subject, the might even show you something new.

Our first impression of the Biblical concept of work might that of the fall of man (and woman), when Adam and Eve are being banished from the Garden of Eden.

We can read in Genesis 3, for those of you following, I will mostly be reading from the New Living Translation, though you should be able to follow along in our usual ESV or English Standard Version, Turn with me in your Bibles or phone APPS to Genesis, Chapter 3.:

Genesis 3:17-24 (NLT2)

¹⁷ And to the man he said, "Since you listened to your wife and ate from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat, the ground is cursed because of you. All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it.

¹⁸ It will grow thorns and thistles for you, though you will eat of its grains.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow will you have food to eat until you return to the ground from which you were made. For you were made from dust, and to dust you will return.”

²⁰ Then the man—Adam—named his wife Eve, because she would be the mother of all who live.

²¹ And the LORD God made clothing from animal skins for Adam and his wife.

²² Then the LORD God said, “Look, the human beings have become like us, knowing both good and evil. What if they reach out, take fruit from the tree of life, and eat it? Then they will live forever!”

²³ So the LORD God banished them from the Garden of Eden, and he sent Adam out to cultivate the ground from which he had been made.

²⁴ After sending them out, the LORD God stationed mighty cherubim to the east of the Garden of Eden. And he placed a flaming sword that flashed back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

We see from this text that God has cursed the work set before us, he has made it hard. Whether we are a farmer, mom, or student, after the fall it just got harder. This seems so contradictory to God’s nature, to provide for us, to love us, to protect us. But God clearly states that this now because SIN has entered into the world. But was it supposed to be that way from the beginning?

We were designed from the beginning for creation to do God’s work.

So, that is the journey that I planned for us this morning.

We will spend some time in the Garden of Eden with Adam, as the first man, Then we will fast forward to the first temple after the exodus from Egypt, then we will fast forward to the time of Jesus, and we will finish up by looking at what Paul, Peter and James had to say in their epistles to the early church, which still apply to us. So, put on your time traveling shoes with me, and let’s jump into...

1. **Scene 1** - Garden of Eden, please turn back a few pages from Genesis 3 to Genesis Chapter 2. Here we find ourselves after creation, in the Garden as God gives Adam his initial assignment:

- a. **Genesis 2:15-17 (ESV)**

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to **work it and keep it**. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

2. **Now, lets start our exploration as we should every journey, with prayer....**

Good morning, Lord. As we open your word this morning, please teach us. Help us to set aside our preconceptions and allow your SPIRIT to teach us through your word this morning. Allow our minds to be renewed through your word. In Jesus name, AMEN.

We are all familiar with the last part of the story, God's instructions to not eat of the tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, but we often gloss over the first part. Let's reflect for a moment, Adam is tasked with working and tending the garden. Here we are in paradise and God's first instructions to Adam are to WORK.

- a. Adam is tasked with **tending** the garden. This is the Hebrew words *abad and shamar*. Which has its primitive root in "to work" or by implication to *serve or tend*,
 - i.

We can surmise that the man's role is to be not only a gardener but also a guardian. As a priest, he is to maintain the sanctity of the garden sanctuary as part of a God's plan of creation.

Why do I say Sanctuary, because like the later temple, man, or Adam, was in the presence of God.

- ii. The garden required maintenance and oversight. Tending the **Garden** was humanity's dignifying work. (This role in God's garden-sanctuary was later applied to God's Tabernacle, more on that later) .

3. **Observation 1**, this is before the fall,
 - a. Since this command comes before Adam sinned, work did **not** come as a result of sin, nor is it something to be avoided. Productive work is part of God's good purpose for men and women as part of creation.
 - b. So, please toggle your mental reset button and as we move forward this morning, let's reconsider the nature of work as something holy, dignified and honoring to God.
 - c. Yes, as we heard in the first verses that I read this morning, work suffered under the curse of sin and it became more burdensome, but that does not diminish the fact that it existed before the fall of man.
4. **Question 1**: So, we ask a question, is **work** only a Genesis thing? We know that it is not, we are still doing work. What do I mean, "We know that work isn't only a Genesis thing, but what does God expect from us now? We are no longer in the Garden of Eden, we don't get up in the morning and start naming animals and pruning the rhododendrons. We have jobs, we have obligations, we have bills and mortgages and traffic. This isn't lighthearted stuff. We're not just picking flowers with God in a garden. So, again, what does working with and for God look like now?."

Stay with me, I know all of that, I live all of that, but God has a purpose. So, let's move on...

5. **Scene 2** – The Arabian desert

- a. Moses, who wrote the first five books of the Old Testament, does not use this language, this Hebrew words *abad*, and *shamar* again until the establishment of the Hebrew priesthood under Aaron and his sons. Where God, through Moses, directs Aaron to **tend** to the worship of the Nation of Israel- Now let's take a look at Numbers chapter 3 turn with me there, ...

Numbers 3:5-13 (ESV)

⁵ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

⁶ “Bring the tribe of Levi near, and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister to him.

⁷ They shall *keep guard* over him and over the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, as they minister at the tabernacle.

⁸ They shall guard all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, and keep guard over the people of Israel as they minister at the tabernacle.

⁹ And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are wholly given to him from among the people of Israel.

¹⁰ And you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall guard their priesthood. But if any outsider comes near, he shall be put to death.”

¹¹ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

¹² “Behold, I have taken the Levites from among the people of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the people of Israel. The Levites shall be mine,

¹³ for all the firstborn are mine. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I consecrated for my own all the firstborn in Israel, both of man and of beast. They shall be mine: I am the LORD.”

6. **Observation 2** – Work, or serving, or tending is considered by God to be *holy work* and an act of worship.
7. **Observation 3** – The Levites were to be like *First Born Sons*. It is Hebrew tradition that first born sons are given to the service of the Lord. My dad was a first born Jewish son, his parents expectation was that he would serve the Lord, but my dad not only refused, he also turned his back on God. (Here is a thought for later on, who is the First Born Son of God?)
8. **Observation 4:** Just because the Levites are set apart for the priesthood, doesn't mean that the rest of don't have Holy work to do. Even though it sometimes seem hard. Whether that is being a mom with strong willed kids or a manager with a staff that just don't understand the task at hand.
9. **Question 2** – But this is the Old Testament, perhaps this does not apply to us as we are now under the commands of Jesus in the Church age and under grace? Besides that, the temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. So how does this all apply to us as believers today? So, we might ask: Is my work holy too? Or is this just for the select few, the priests and Levites of the Old Testament

Let's travel on...as we saw from my opening scripture, we know that the fall and the curse affects work. But Jesus redeems that through his work on the cross. He overturns the curse. Even the thorns he wears as a crown, are a picture of God's curse on work being borne by him. It

appears like Jesus has worked for nothing - nothing to show for it at the end. Disciples betrayed and abandoned. Even forsaken by His Father.

But in resurrection, it all changes! Now, as we are told in the book of Hebrews, we are made priests and can serve, tend and guard. Now we don't labor in vain but with hope, Hebrews does that he is the ultimate Priest and in Him we become a "royal priesthood" all our lives lived in God's presence, working with and for him. and God will reward every deed and make it fruitful in the end, however hard it feels now.

10. **Scene 3** – The New Testament:

- a. What does Jesus say about work? As in many cases, Jesus answers the question with a parable, turn in you Bibles with me to the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 12, verse 14:

Luke 12:13-21 (ESV)

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

¹⁴ But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?"

¹⁵ And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

¹⁶ And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully,

¹⁷ and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?'

¹⁸ And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.

¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."'

²⁰ But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'

²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

I'll bet that many of us think like this rich man, we all are like him, some of us just can't wait for retirement. We tend to think it's work so that we can rest, as if work is the "necessary evil" to getting leisure. We put up with the weekday work so we can get to the weekend play! But that is not Jesus' view of it: Leisure is not what God has in mind for us, He expects us to use the gifts that he has given us for both the service of the church, His people, the community and the lost. We are not saved by our works, or work, but by God's grace through the death of His first-born son, but we are still called to use our God given gifts and talents to work for God's Glory.

That is not to say that we should not rest, I will leave the whole idea of Sabbath Rest for another time, but rest assured, rest is necessary and mandated and exemplified by God.

Some in our culture either think too little or too much of work. They either despise it or they idolize it. Many here in Silicon Valley put too much stock in work and then get frustrated when it doesn't deliver, they may even want to quit. But this is because we are not placing our work in the context of God and ESPECIALLY Christ's at the cross! That changes everything.

So these are those people like the tower of Babel, working hard, but for their own name, to find their own, their own identity, and it amounts to nothing but heartache. When we find our identity in Jesus' work and come to see our own work in light of his, we are free to labor in love and it will be eternally fruitful.

Now let's see what the Apostle **Peter** has to say about work and this idea that we are called to service, or work as a living priesthood...Let's turn to First Peter, Chapter 2, verse 4, the YOU here is US:

1 Peter 2:4-12 (ESV)

⁴ As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious,

⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

⁶ For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

⁷ So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,"

⁸ and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

- b. **We are a living priesthood, intended to continue what the Aaronic priesthood started. We are intended to worship God and tend his sheep.** We are like Peter at the end of the Gospel of John, when Jesus restores him to fellowship and tells Peter to Feed my sheep, tend my lambs. We have been MORE than restored to fellowship, we have been commissioned to great works for God's Glory. We are called to be the light of the world, where ever God has placed us; at home, at Google, at Facebook, at all times to all people. As people of the Light, we are to work with integrity in all things, we are show love to our neighbors, we are to pray for those that are in need of salvation, to keep them from hell.

11. And Peter takes this a step further, turn with me a few pages to First Peter, Chapter 4 verse 10, where Peter writes:

1 Peter 4:10-11 (ESV)

¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied

grace:

¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

We see from this scripture that God has given us gifts to serve one another, there is that word *serve* again, we are to tend the sheep of the Lord.

12. Then there is the brother of Jesus, James, who boldly states:

a. **James 2:14-26 (ESV)**

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ¹⁹ You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! ²⁰ Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; ²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God.

²⁴ You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

²⁵ And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? ²⁶ For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

b. **Yes, I know that this is speaking of faith versus works, but our works of faith matter to the Lord. God cares about our work and our attitude towards it.**

13. **Observation 3** -perhaps this is bad news for some of you, but likely there will be tending or work to do in heaven, since work was in the cards in the garden. After Jesus second coming, we expect the new heaven and a new earth that will be like the original relationship between God and Adam, aka. The first man.

14. **Conclusion**

- a. We have looked at work and tending in the Old Testament, we have looked at it from the vantage point of Jesus and the Apostles Peter and James, but you ask what does our prolific New Testament writer Paul have to say on the subject. Here is what he recommends to the churches at Colosse and Laodicea:

Now turn with me to Colossians, Chapter 2, verse 16

Colossians 2:6-15 (ESV)

⁶ Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,

⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,

¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

¹¹ In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,

¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,

¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Paul reminds us that we are not supposed to be sucked into the things of the world, that we are part of a different kingdom, the Kingdom of God that was established at His first coming and will come to fruition at His second coming. That is a mystery that the Jews did not understand.

15. Scene 4 - Here and Now:

- a. Turn with me to Hebrews, Chapter 13, verse 7.

16. Hebrews 13:7-17 (ESV)

⁷ Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

⁹ Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.

¹⁰ We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat.

¹¹ For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp.

¹² So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.

¹³ Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.

¹⁴ For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

¹⁵ Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

¹⁶ Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

17. If you recall, the Book of Hebrew was written to Christians who were once Jews and were considering recanting their faith and returning to their old ways. Sometimes we are like that, we get tired of the being the light, of being “not of this world.” We just want to be like other people, but that is not our calling.
- a. We are back to reality; you can remove your time traveling shoes.
 - b. Let me share my transformation. As I shared earlier, I came to this place called Silicon Valley with many expectations. Perhaps that is your story too. I now had to transition from a college life to a work life in a new place with no friends and support system. I will share, my first few months here were a paradox, the work was good, but I was lonely. Fortunately, I fell back on my faith. I looked for and found a workplace lunchtime Bible study. I had my beliefs reassured, that God could be found in the workplace. That there is glory for God in doing your vocation well, whether as an engineer, stay home or home school mom, as a retired person. Work was not often easy, I was laid off three times, once for a whole year. We raised three sons, one of whom loved to challenge every word out of my mouth. We bought a house on a single income, in this valley that has always been expensive. I learned that God could be found, and love could be shared where God had placed me. He had created me for this time and season and there were no substitutes. I needed to show up and be God’s light. We might think that work is your enabler for ministry, but that is false. We were created for work, work that God uniquely gifted us for. The doctrine of vocation, properly understood, frees us from our sinful selves through the gospel as our love for God overflows into love for our neighbors. The two greatest commands from Jesus still hold true in our workplace, Love the Lord your God with all your heart mind and soul and Love you Neighbor as yourself.
 - c. So, How do we do this tomorrow? Outside the Camp of Church, I mean not on Sunday, here in church, but on Monday and Tuesday and through the week?
 - i. If you are a Homeschool parent, do it to glorify God, teach your kids to love one another and love those around us.
 - ii. IF you are a Student learn to respect your fellow learners, help those that are struggling and falling behind. Show appreciation to you fellow students as you learn and prepare of adulthood.
 - iii. If you are retired, use your talents to coach and mentor the next generation so that Jesus can be seen in their lives and by all means, use your time freedom to pray, pray for us, the church, pray for the 98% of the people in this valley that are not in church today, pray for the unreached and unengaged, see me after if you need resources,
 - iv. If you are an Office workers, say hello to those around you, be the light of world for the people that don’t yet have the hope of Jesus. Invite a co-worker to lunch and share what you heard this morning, challenge them to consider coming to hear what you have heard, and believe what you believe, share your hope in Jesus.

- v. For Mom's with crying babies and toddlers, you get an extra hug, these might be hard days, call out to your church family for help and assurance and guidance. You can love well and know that from my vantage point, those days are precious and short.
- d. We have work and tending to do, our faith is about doing, not watching, it is about obedience and serving. It is about worship and being a high priest for Jesus sake because He paid the ultimate sacrifice for us, so that we could be Joint heirs with Him.

18. I'll close with one last verse, Galatians, five, verse six. Then we will pray

a. **Galatians 5:6 (ESV)**

⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

Our vocation or work is to stand for Christ in and through all things.

Let's Pray

Study Guide

1. This morning's not so dirty four letter word is _____
2. Adam was told to _____ in the garden before the fall.
3. The Garden of Eden was like a Sanctuary because Adam was in the presence of _____
4. In the Arabian Desert, Moses sets the _____ as first born sons to do the work of tabernacle.
5. We stand in the same place as Aaron before God, because we are all called to be _____ before Him.
6. The parable of the rich man reminds us that God created us for _____ not for _____.
7. The Apostle Peter tells us that we are a _____ priesthood, called out of darkness in marvelous light.
8. God has given us _____ gifts to serve one another.
9. We are to walk each day in _____.
10. Our V_____ or w_____ is to stand for Christ in and through all things.
11. How will you change your attitude about work or school or life tomorrow?

12. How will people around you see that change?