

*Work?*

If you ask your grandparents or someone from their generation about the jobs they worked throughout their life, you will probably be impressed by the hard labor or long hours they dedicated themselves to with a strong sense of commitment and the need to provide for their families. When you talk to people from that generation about their childhood, you will hear them honor their resourceful parents as they tell stories about their mothers who could cook any delicious meal without a recipe, and their fathers who would be working in whatever condition to provide for his family. No matter how little or how much you know already about your grandparents, or great aunts and uncles, I encourage you to talk to them about their past work. When you do, I think you will be inspired by a vision of work that—for the most part—is pleasing to God.

Work may not be that appealing to you. Maybe you think of it as this dull, adult activity that most people are obligated to do when they grow up if they want to have money. Part of that is true, but the Bible paints a spectacular picture of work that should change our mind about what we do with our lives. Let's turn again to the early chapters of Genesis and see this time what God has said about the work he has given to mankind. Please read Genesis 1:26-2:15; I will include the first and last verses. **“Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth...The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.”** As God brings his creative labors to a completion, he makes mankind in his image, to reflect his own nature. By the end of this passage, we see that God makes man and puts him in the garden for the purpose of working and keeping it. Mankind reflects the Maker through work: just as God worked six days and rested on the seventh, so also mankind has been made to work and rest. Work shows our dignity, namely our dignity as image-bearers. In work, we show our strength, skill, imagination, intelligence, love, and kindness—all of which are characteristics of God, whose likeness we bear. In fact, work is a primary way that displays our status as image-bearers. What an honorable privilege it is to work! Like a duck is wonderfully suitable for water with its webbed feet and oily feathers, so also are we built for mirroring God in work with our fingers, eyes, mind, back, and feet.

Work shows our dignity, and it also shows our dominion. If you look at verses 26 and 28, you will see God giving the water, land, and heavens over to man and woman to rule. God is the

Lord of heaven and earth, and he gives mankind the position to rule underneath him. We are made to reflect God in how we rule over the earth; as he rules over the earth with generosity and righteousness, so also are we. In being given dominion over the earth, we are told to assert our will over the different creatures, not as harsh taskmasters, but as kind, firm cultivators. Using imagination and skill, we assert our will over the ground and plants, tilling dirt, planting seeds, pulling weeds, and plucking fruit. We assert our will over animals, which is seen in things like hunting deer, raising chickens, and training pets. We even can see our dominion in electronic inventions, in which we have harnessed the raw energy of electricity for our own purposes. Every job, from cutting the grass to filing documents, has different elements of dominion over the earth, and therefore shows how we resemble our Lord and Maker.

In addition to our dignity and dominion, work also shows our dependency. Verses 29-30 tell of God giving every green plant for food to man and beast. We need to work in order to live; this is how God has made us. Work is required if we are to have our needs of food, water, and shelter met. We are dependent upon the dust from which we were formed. This harmonious dependency we have on the rest of creation shows that while we are rulers, we are fragile ones. Food shortages, extreme temperatures, or other natural events can wipe away our life. This puts us in a humble position that should be accompanied with thanksgiving to God who sustains it all.

God has given us many roles that require different kinds of work. We have roles in the home, like father, mother, brother, sister, son, or daughter. We have roles in our country and community as citizens. We have roles at our church in how we serve. We have many different jobs in our lives, and each one is to bring God glory. At your age, you should be considering your future and the different roles that you might have, or might like to have. People probably ask you on certain occasions, “What would you like to be when you grow up?” You might even be taking tests that can point you down certain career paths. Sometimes we can be led to believe that there is one career in your life that you are meant for, and that you must discover what is and do whatever it takes to secure that job for your own happiness. This idea is partially true. Judging from experience, observation, and the witness of Scripture, I think it is very rare for God to call someone to only one place of work for the entirety of life. That being said, it does seem to be the case that God calls people to a particular line of work throughout our lives, in general.

It is an important and weighty task to determine what kind of job you would like to do. Really, when we are trying to determine what kind of job we want to do, we should be trying

answer these kinds of questions, “What has God made me to do?” “What has God made me to do in this season of my life?” or “What is God’s will for my life?” It might come as a surprise, but God has given us quite a bit of freedom when it comes to selecting our occupation. God’s will, or what pleases God, is whatever is good and acceptable to him, which covers a broad amount of things in creation. I believe we can discern what kind of God-honoring work we are especially fit for based upon what God provides and permits. As for what God provides, we can survey our interests, skills, and opportunities to find a good job. When it comes to our interests, these are things which we like, enjoy, desire, or always have a curiosity in—interests which God has given us as unique individuals. When it comes to our skills, these are things which we are good at doing, and typically, these things correlate to what we like. Skills, whether they are natural-born talents or acquired, are meant to be trained and developed. Who gives us the abilities to do anything except God? And when it comes to our opportunities, these are things which we have experience in, have watched other people do, or have the chance to learn these things. Often our opportunities shape our interests and our skills. Also, our opportunities often come by the jobs our relatives have, the classes our schools offer, or even advertisements. But let me be clear, interests, skills, and opportunities do not just land in our laps. It requires effort to get out and try different things, even difficult or boring tasks, in order to recognize the things we like, the things we can do well, and the ways we can put ourselves to work.

I would like to say more—and did say more Wednesday night—but I see that my page is running short. If you continue to read in Genesis, you will see Adam and Eve sin and then be cursed by God. God cursed our labor, which makes work now a struggle, pointless, and boring at times. Because of our sin, there is mistreatment in the workplace. But the Son of God has come, and has brought salvation, even restoring us to properly bear the image of God. Christians, since we are new creatures, are especially called to work with excellence in order to provide for their families. Every task is to be done for God to be praised. You can see this in Colossians 3:22-25, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12, and 1 Timothy 5:8.

Even though you are young, you are still fully human, which means you are meant for work, even now. From doing your chores or hobbies to going to a paid job, you should be active in some kind of work. Yet, since you are still young, do not neglect your childhood and forget to have fun and play. Play is a good gift of God, in whatever acceptable form it takes place. Seek the counsel of wise adults when it comes to work and play to help you honor God always.