



**Connect Groups at HTC:
November 2023**

Three weeks looking at *God and our Daily Work*:

Work: A Good Thing
Work: A Broken Thing
Work: A Kingdom Thing

*God our Father,
you never cease the work you have begun
and prosper with your blessing all human labour:
make us wise and faithful stewards of your gifts,
that we may serve the common good,
maintain the fabric of our world
and seek that justice where all may share
the good things you pour upon us;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.*

(Collect for Rogation Day in the Church of England)

Work is not only a human activity, but also a divine calling. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). God worked to create us and created us to work: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). God also created work to be good, even if it's hard to see this in a fallen world. Work as part of our created purpose is seen in Ephesians 2:10: "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Work can accomplish many of God's purposes for our lives: the necessities of food and shelter, the development and cultivation of society and civilisation, as well as a sense of fulfilment and joy. Our work can create ways to help people thrive; it can uncover the depths of God's creation; and it can bring us into wonderful relationships with co-workers and those who benefit from our work (customers, clients, patients, neighbours etc).

But is this the reality of our work today? Many people face drudgery, boredom, or exploitation at work. We have bad bosses, hostile relationships, and unsupportive work environments. Our work seems meaningless, unappreciated, faulty, frustrating. We don't get paid enough. We get stuck in dead-end jobs or laid off or fired. We fail. Our skills become obsolete. It's a struggle just to make ends meet. How can this be if God created work to be good, and what can we do about it? God's answers for these questions must be somewhere in the Bible, but where?

This 3-week CG series aims to:

1) Rediscover the meaning of work in light of what the Bible teaches.

Work, according to the Bible:

- Is the way I make my life useful to others
- Involves purposeful activity that expends significant energy, as an avenue to join God's work in the transformation of the world
- Is not confined to paid employment, salaried roles, jobs, or occupation.
- Can be considered part of Ministry (service, *diakonía* in New Testament Greek), which all Christians, without exception, are called to. This series is therefore of relevance to everyone in the body of Christ, not just those in the paid workplace.
- Is transformed by the gospel, the kingdom of God, and our future hope of the new creation.

2) Help us develop an understanding of the good and missional purpose of work, while acknowledging the brokenness and frustration of work according to the Bible.

3) Encourage each other towards becoming whole-life ("Sunday-to-Saturday") disciples from a "whole-Bible" perspective.

Our Christian lives are more than just the one day a week when we gather as the church. Rather, all aspects of our lives in every sphere of God’s created world clearly matter to Jesus. As his disciples, we seek to submit all aspects of our lives to the Lordship of Christ. It is only in Jesus that we, and our work, can be transformed to become the blessing it was always meant to be, as we see Jesus Christ (and not ourselves) as the ultimate Worker.

The Bible comes to us as a great narrative, or drama, sweeping from creation (Genesis) to new creation (Revelation) – and it could be described as six “acts.” We have selected just three “acts” for CGs, to inform our understanding of our daily work, whether paid or unpaid, energising or boring. At HTC, we’ll be looking at just “act” 1, 2 and 4, but the full Bible sweep has three other acts (see below), so do ask if you’d like to see notes for these other “acts”!

Main passage	Bible Act	Biblical work theme
Gen 1:26-2:7, 2:15	Act 1: Creation. <i>Designed for good</i>	Work: A good thing
Gen 11:1-9, Ecc 2:1-11, 17-25	Act 2: The Fall. <i>Damaged by evil</i>	Work: A broken thing
Gen 12:1-9	Act 3: Old Testament Israel. <i>Chosen to bless</i>	Work: A justice thing
Eph 5:5-9, Col 3:22-4:1	Act 4: Christ and the gospel. <i>Working for the Lord</i>	Work: A kingdom thing
1 Pet 2:11-22 Matt 5:14-16	Act 5: The mission of the church. <i>Commending the gospel</i>	Work: A mission thing
Is 65:17-25 Rev 21:1-8, 1:23-22:5	Act 6: New Creation. <i>Everything set right</i>	Work: A glory thing

Accompanying the CG series at HTC will be:-

- Sermon at HTC on Sunday 26 November (at 11.15am only) on ‘God at Work’
- Weekly 5mins CGL videos from Ed & Sarah (which you may like to play in your CG too).

We also highly recommend:

- LICC – including ‘The Great Divide’ and podcasts <https://licc.org.uk/resources>
- Tim Keller & Katherine Alsdorf’s book ‘Every Good Endeavour’ and Jago’s ‘Working without Wilting’
- Sermon by Deputy High Court Judge David Turner on ‘Ambition’ www.allsouls.org/Media/AllMedia.aspx?show_media=150376&show_file=161763
- Work in the biblical framework – 12mins Bible overview from Dennaë Pierre, of City to City <https://vimeo.com/710538286/57ab5ad807>
- HTC Workplace Networks www.holytrinityclapham.org/htc-workplace

These notes are adapted, with permission, from Fellowship Group studies, ‘Work in the Light of the Bible’s Great Story,’ Summer 2022, by Chris Wright and Suze Arulogun of All Souls Langham Place.



14/15 November 2023 //

Work: A Good Thing

LEADER NOTES: Work is good because it is God's idea, based on the nature of God himself. The first thing we are told about human beings is that God created us in his own image. As such, in several key aspects, we were created to be "like God" – to reflect God within the rest of the created order. One thing we discover about God in Genesis 1 is that he is a Worker. We observe the one true living God thinking and declaring an intention, planning, speaking, accomplishing, reviewing, approving. God is at work in creation, working systematically and cumulatively towards a goal which he declares to be "very good"

Starter question:

Whether you are working or retired or unemployed - how do you spend much of your time in the working week? What's your current attitude to your daily labours? What do you think God thinks of it?

1. God the Worker

Read: Genesis 1:26-2:7, and 2:15

i) What are the qualities of God as Worker in Genesis 1:1-25?

(e.g. ordering, creativity, beauty, releasing potential, attention to detail, provision etc).

ii) What can we learn about our work (its dignity, purpose, what it can accomplish), from the creation work of God?

2. The Goodness of Work

i) What tasks does God give mankind to do in

the Garden of Eden? How do God's work and man's work go together? What does this mean in our 21st century context today?

Maybe reflect on even just today or this week through the lens of this command to see how God cares for His world through the hands of people.

ii) As God's people, we have a dual role, both of which necessitate work: to exercise God's kingly rule within creation (Genesis 1:28), and to exercise the priestly role of serving and keeping what God has entrusted to our responsible use and care (Genesis 2:15).

In what ways do we see the dignity of this calling in each of our daily work?

Make sure we include non-employment work, such as caring/parenting/life-min/gardening etc. Think of Jesus' work as a carpenter..!

iii) What difference would it make if we had a richer, fuller, view of our work?

How, this week, could we have this perspective?

3. Resting from our Work

i) Read Exodus 20:8-11. How can we approach our balance of Work and Rest based on God's example?

ii) Is our danger under-working or over-working? Why?

Pray ...

for seeing more of God's perspective on your work



21/22 November 2023 //

Work: A Broken Thing

LEADER NOTES: We chose to rebel against God's authority, distrust God's goodness, and reject God's guidance. As a result, our lives as working human beings are broken and spoiled by sin. This affects us individually, and also pervades the whole social and economic world of work. Work becomes "painful toil" (Genesis 3:17-19) – hard, sweated labour, and yet necessary for survival. God's good design for work that we saw in Genesis 1-2 is not ripped up and thrown away, but rather it has been broken and distorted because of human sin and God's judgement of it. As Christians, we are still to serve God in the work He has given us, and that work may still be a source of joy and satisfaction, but there will also be pain and difficulty – now we must work simply to survive on ground that "fights back," resisting, frustrating, and exhausting our efforts.

Starter question: What do you enjoy most and least about your daily work?

1. Painful Toil

Read: Genesis 3:17-19

i) How do we see here how work is now a mixed bag? In what ways do you experience that?

(e.g. frustration of tasks, the difficulties of relationships, the repetitiveness, the difficulty in seeing the impact, the idols in one's heart it reveals, any injustices at work etc...).

ii) In what ways is it easy to think, 'If I just had that job or this role, things would be different?' How does Genesis 3 help us to be realistic about all work?

2. Human Ambition

Read Genesis 11:1-9

i) What was these people's ambition in building this tower? What was wrong with this (compare with Genesis 1:26-28)?

ii) In what ways do we still know the temptation today to try to boost our own name or reputation through our work?

ii) Are there ways in which work has the danger of taking God's place in your life - where we get our sense of Identity, security and meaning - and therefore becoming an idol?

(it may be easier to discuss this in 2s or 3s)

3. Holding both

i) How do we need to hold together the 'double lenses' of creation and fall - both the Goodness of Work in Genesis 1 and the Brokenness of Work in Genesis 2? What happens if we only emphasise one?

(If we think work should be perfect and deliver all fulfilment and purposefulness, we're idolising it...

But if we are only negative about work and forget how it's serving God's care of His world, we'll be robbing it of its dignified usefulness)

iii) Maybe listen or sing together [with Advent starting in a week]

'Joy to the World, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King.'

It's (rarely sung!) third verse declares:
No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.

How does the brokenness of our work, and this song, make us yearn and pray for the Lord to come to our workplaces and lives - and ultimately one day for full healing when Christ returns?

Pray... Spend some time praying for any in the group, where work is particularly stressful, or unfair, or who are struggling with unemployment or retirement.



28/29 November 2023 //

Work: A Kingdom Thing

LEADER NOTES: The arrival of the Lord Jesus Christ and his announcement of the gospel of the kingdom of God is the climactic central act of the Bible's story: God has established his kingdom through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. The kingdom of God, embodied in the Lordship of Christ, is the heartbeat of the gospel and of the church's mission in the world. Jesus is Lord of all creation, and that includes the world of human work. So, to be a Christian is to join all disciples of Jesus from then until now, accepting Christ as Saviour and submitting to him as Lord. That means that every aspect of life is lived in grateful obedience under his Lordship and for his sake and glory, including our working lives in whatever capacity.

Starter question:

If you had known Jesus sitting right by your side today or this week at work, what do you think He would have been pleased by? Would there have been anything you'd have been a bit embarrassed by?

Read Colossians 3:22-4:1

(NB See Ed's sermon 'God at Work', from 26 November 2023 based on this Colossians passage). The key is to be **as practical and down-to-earth as you can: don't keep it theoretical!**

1. A new master

i) Three times we're told that in our secular work we are working "for the Lord."

Do we believe that? What other things do we work "for"?

(On Sunday Ed mentioned Status; Salary; Satisfaction; Stability: Which of these resonate?)

ii) What would really change tomorrow if we remembered our work is to be done serving for the Lord?

2. A new manner

i) Spend a good while discussing:

How does working for the Lord Jesus affect our attitudes to our work, our workplace, our colleagues, and all those in authority over us (bosses etc)?

Would this be counter-cultural at all?

In particular - (maybe in 2s or 3s) discuss the impact on:

a) Integrity (v.22 'sincerity')

Is there anything the Spirit of truth may put his finger on in your work?

b) Whole-heartedness

(v.23 'with all your heart')

c) Career ambitions & priorities

3. GOING FURTHER: A new motive

Read the following passages one after the other:

Eph. 4:28; 1 Thess. 4:11-12;

2 Thess. 3:6-13. Titus 2:3, 7, 14, 3:1, 3:8

i) What other motives does Paul give for why Christians ought to be diligent in our work?

ii) This Advent, which colleagues etc could you pray are drawn closer to Jesus - and why not invite them to Carols..!?

4. A new means

Look at Colossians 3:1-4

i) How is living & working differently only possible because of us being united to Jesus by the Spirit?

Pray...

Maybe play this song, as you lead into prayer:

www.stuarttownend.co.uk/song/a-workers-prayer

Self-Appraisal...

After 3 weeks of CGs thinking about Work, some people(!) love a good Appraisal Form, to help with reflecting on God & Work. Why not meet with another member of your CG this month, and again in 3 months' time, to chat, reflect and pray?

1. Gospel in Life Reflection

Here's one from Tim Keller's study-course 'Gospel in Life', which you may like

Questions	In your workplace
What is the main purpose of the work? What goal does it seek to fulfil?	
What methods does it use to achieve its purpose? How does it try to meet the goal?	
Who decides what happens in your workplace? What kinds of people decide what is valued?	
What people or situations influence the decisions that are made?	
What does it mean to be successful?	
What are the idols?	
Whom do people admire?	
How are Christians characterized?	
What about being a Christian is most offensive? What is most acceptable/valued?	
What worldview is predominant in the field or among those in your workplace?	
How does that worldview affect the form and content of the work?	
What parts of the dominant worldview are basically in line with the gospel?	
What parts of the dominant worldview are irresolvable without Christ?	
How can Christ finish the story?	
In what areas do you feel called to challenge your work's culture?	
What opportunities are there to work with excellence and with Christian distinctiveness?	
What opportunities are there for (a) serving people, (b) helping society, (c) witnessing to Christ?	

2. Christ-like Formation at Work ...

Here's a self-appraisal form from former All Souls' minister Mark Meynell on growing in godliness at work:

www.markmeynell.net/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/aslp-workplace-appraisal.pdf