



“Purpose” Session Leader Guide

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Discussion (20-30 Minutes) If you have a large group consider breaking into groups of 8-10.

- Does my work or career matter to God?
- How can I bring Christ into a “secular” profession?
- How can we know we’re doing what we were made to do?
- If God has a plan for us, can we miss it or mess it up?

Key Message: Bottom line, “you have the freedom to take risks, to fail, and to make mistakes. Take heart, at the end, you will not be judged on getting the right job or fulfilling your God-given potential. You will be judged on the merits of Jesus Christ, applied to you only by God’s grace in giving you faith.”¹ Remember, God’s primary aim for us is that we be conformed to the image of his Son and be his ambassadors to the world--and that we enjoy *him* in the process.

Promise to send additional “deeper dive” resources/info to students about this week’s subject on a certain day of the following week. Offer to discuss any of the questions raised with students individually. Announce next week’s lesson topic and dismiss. You can reference the “Post-Session Messages” document for suggestions.

Prayer (5 Minutes) Pray as you would for your group. (See “A Prayer for All Kinds of Workers on the next page 3)



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A Prayer for All Kinds of Workers:

Bless the work of our hands, God.
Bless the hands that work the land;
Hands that move earth, plant seeds and harvest,
Hands with callouses and dirty fingernails, strong hands.

Bless the hands that use machines;
hands that drive cars, trucks and forklifts,
hands on computer keyboards, capable hands.

Bless the hands that make things;
hands that manufacture and create,
working wood and metal and plastic, practical hands.

Bless the hands that clean;
hands that wash, mop and scrub,
hands that know what to do with soap, determined hands.

Bless the hands that make music and art;
hands that play instruments and hold paintbrushes,
hands that are creative tools, artistic hands.

Bless the hands that care for people;
hands that cook and feed, heal and nurture,
hands with a gentle touch, loving hands.

Bless the hands that are generous;
hands that give away money and food,
hands that are always trying to be empty, Christ-like hands.

Bless the tiny, baby hands.
Bless the strong adult hands.
Bless the hands that are folded in prayer.
Bless the hands that are lifted in praise.
Our hands do the work of your hands,
O God our Creator. Amen.



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LEADER
TOOLS

DARKROOM Purpose EPISODE: “Things With No Purpose”

Jace’s brother, Tai, is going to become a pastor. But Jace has other dreams and they aren’t “religious.” He wants to run his own business! But is that the best use of his gifts? Will that career choice honor God?

Key Message: Bottom line, “you have the freedom to take risks, to fail, and to make mistakes. Take heart, at the end, you will not be judged on getting the right job or fulfilling your God-given potential. You will be judged on the merits of Jesus Christ, applied to you only by God’s grace in giving you faith.”¹ Remember, God’s primary aim for us is that we be conformed to the image of his Son and be his ambassadors to the world—and that we enjoy *him* in the process.

Discussion Questions:

1 | Does my work or career matter to God?

Everything about you matters to God, *including* the work you do—not because God needs you as a cog in some cosmic staffing scheme, performing a certain task for his benefit, but because work is a realm where each of us—no matter what *kind* of work we do—can honor God and love others.

From the very beginning, God built work into the fabric of humanity. Adam and Eve were given roles in the Garden of Eden: they were commanded to be fruitful, and to have dominion over all that God made; in other words, to engage creatively and redemptively in the world as God’s ambassadors. Work was never the result of the fall; it was always part of God’s plan.

Each of us is created as a worker, too, regardless of the task or tasks God draws us to. And while it can be challenging to discern the particular sort of work God may be calling you to at any different point, there can be no doubt that he made you as a worker and that he expects you to work, to the degree you are able. “Whatever you do,” Paul wrote to the disciples at Colossae, “do your work heartily, as for the Lord, rather than for men.



“Purpose” Leader Study Guide

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Remember, it is the Lord Christ whom you serve.”¹ In other words, work hard, work with excellence, and consider your work as an offering to God.

So, yes, our work matters to God. But in the video, Jace and his friends are wondering about the *specific* work they might do. Jace’s brother Tai wants to be a minister, and everyone agrees that God could certainly “get behind” that kind of calling. But Jace is more interested in business and seems concerned that that might *not* be a true “calling.” There are certainly times when God’s call to work *is* quite specific. Moses was called to lead the Israelites out of Egypt—and he insisted he was unqualified! Jonah was called to evangelize the city of Ninevah, and he ran the other way. Mary was called to give birth to the Son of God and mother him, and she said yes to her assignment. But for most of us, many opportunities exist for the kind of work we might do.

If you are passionate about business like Jace, that could be a viable option for creative and redemptive work for God. Former Coca Cola senior executive Bonnie Wurzbacher, a devout Christian and the daughter of a minister, studied to become a teacher and taught for a short time, but then took on a different role in business, and loved it. “I’m very passionate about the critical role and responsibility of business,” she explains, “and how it advances the economic well-being of people around the world. Business allows other institutions to exist—including churches, schools, hospitals, and every non-profit organization—by creating jobs, salaries and corporate tax revenues. It gives Christians an incredible place to honor God. When a business fails you see the impact on everything else, and *vice versa*.”

Could she have glorified God and loved others through a long career in the classroom? Of course! And there are likely several avenues any of us could take and still be obedient to God in our work. Many people have more than one career over the course of their lives, pursuing second and third acts very different from their initial work. Here are some things to remember about the place of work in God’s kingdom:

- Everyone is called to belong to Christ and participate in his creative and redemptive work.
- Everyone is commanded to work to the degree they are able.
- God calls us to a *whole life*, not just to a particular job.

¹ Colossians 3:23-24



2 | How can I bring Christ into a “secular” profession?

The idea that there is “sacred” work and “secular” work is not taught in the Bible. We do see priests and rabbis who served as spiritual guides, but there were carpenters, fishermen, farmers, merchants and craftsmen whose work honored God, too. Somewhere along the way the Church allowed the Greek idea of dualism to influence its view of work or vocation.

Greek philosophy taught that there were two opposing forces at work in the world (good and evil) and applied that dualistic concept to many areas of life. For example, they rightly believed that humans had both a body and a spirit but viewed the body as bad or less important than the spirit, which they saw as good. With this perspective, it was not difficult to imagine that work that dealt with spiritual things was more valuable than, say, baking bread or tending sheep or collecting taxes.

Some Christians today still view spiritual vocations like minister or missionary or worship leader to be more valuable to God’s kingdom than secular vocations like business owner or journalist or construction manager. But no two-tiered scheme of value exists that teaches that church work or full-time ministry matters more to God than any other kind of work. In fact, the Bible tells us that *all* work is Christian work when it is done with excellence and meets the needs or improves the lives of others: “As each has received a gift,” wrote the apostle Peter, “use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”²

God is honored by Christians who do good work, and who are being transformed to the image of Christ and not conformed to the world. He is honored by believers who care for others and who serve and lead them well. We bring Christ into our professions—sacred or secular—when we bring our whole selves to our work, and when we are willing to bring Christ with us. Every believer is called to regard Christ the Lord as holy in his or her heart, and when anyone asks us about our hope, to be ready to defend it—pointing humbly and gently to the gospel.

When we do this, we are serving God. British author Dorothy Sayers—a contemporary of C. S. Lewis who began *her* career as an advertising writer—said it like this: “All work done well and for his glory is Christian work.”

² | Peter 4:10



3 | How can we know we’re doing what we were made to do?

Author and minister Frederick Buechner says, “The place God calls you to is the place where your great joy and the world’s great hunger meet.” Some Christians have the idea that God’s will for their work lives must be the very thing that would make them the most miserable. So, if the idea of serving as a missionary in Somalia or Afghanistan fills them with fear and dread, they imagine that must be God’s will. Crazy, right?

But God doesn’t mean for serving him to make us miserable! He gives us unique combinations of gifts, desires and opportunities that both fit us, and answer real needs or hungers in the world around us. Author Leigh McLeroy describes it like this: “Anytime I create something that rings true I’m reminded of a line from an Andrew Peterson song that I love. He says, ‘A thing resounds when it rings true, ringing all the bells inside of you.’ When you hit that sweet spot in your work, you know it. You hear the bells ring, and other people hear them too.”

When our demonstrated skills are affirmed by others and put to good use, we sense that we are doing what we are made to do. We’re productive. We’re joyful. We’re aware that the thing we do has a purpose and can see God working through it.

One important note here: Not everyone is paid for the work they believe is their calling. Many people work their whole lives at a job that pays the bills so that they can do the thing that fills their soul on their own time. There is no dishonor in this if they are doing their job well. So, the dental hygienist who cleans teeth Monday - Friday so that she can lead an inner-city children’s choir on the weekends is “doing what she was made to do.” So is the mother of small children who stays home with them every day and writes late into the night after she puts them to bed.

God is calling us to a life that honors him and blesses others. There are as many different ways for that to look as there are people. Your way won’t look like your best friend’s way, and it may not even look the same in your own life from season to season. But if you are using the gifts and skills God gave you, working with excellence and doing your work in a way that positively impacts others, you *are* doing what you were made to do!



4 | If God has a plan for us, can we miss it or mess it up?

This is one of our greatest fears, isn't it? Not FOMO (the fear of missing out), but FOMU—the fear of messing up. The idea that one wrong move from us can stymie the will of God is heavy burden to bear, and we can spend a lifetime second-guessing ourselves and asking, “what if?”

“What if I hadn't failed organic chemistry?”

“What if I'd gone to a different university, or hadn't changed my major?”

“What if I hadn't gotten married when I did, or married the one I did?”

“What if I'd found out sooner that I really loved to sing,” or design buildings or create IT systems?

The truth is, God's plans for us are always good and in the end, his sovereign, absolute will *will* be done. Look at the Old Testament story of Israel. God's will was to get the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land, and for Moses to lead them there. And despite plenty of grumbling, disobedience, unbelief and compromise, God got them there. What should have been a few months' journey took 40 years, but the Israelites arrived in Canaan.

We can mess up, but we can't derail God's sovereign will. What he means to be, will be. We can create delays and confusion, cause ourselves and others pain, and fail to glorify God in the process, but if we are truly seeking God and living in obedience to him, we can be confident he will do with our lives what he means to do. Paul wrote to his friends in the church at Philippi, “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”³ That assurance frees us from paralyzing fears about “messing up” his plan.

Bottom line, “you have the freedom to take risks, to fail, and to make mistakes. Take heart, at the end, you will not be judged on getting the right job or fulfilling your God-given potential. You will be judged on the merits of Jesus Christ, applied to you only by God's grace in giving you faith.”⁴ Remember, God's primary aim for us is that we be conformed to the image of his Son and be his ambassadors to the world—and that we enjoy *him* in the process.

³ Philippians 1:6

⁴ Theology of Work Project, “Guidance to a Job or Profession,” <https://www.theologyofwork.org/key-topics/vocation-overview-article/discerning-gods-guidance-to-a-particular-kind-of-work/guidance-to-a-job-or-profession>



Supporting Scripture

Genesis 2: 1-3,15. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Isaiah 65: 21-22 They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands.

Micah 6:8 He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God

John 5:17 In his defense Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.”

Romans 12: 1-8 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

II Corinthians 5:17-20 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us



“Purpose” Leader Study Guide

LEADER
TOOLS

the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Colossians 3:23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.

1 Peter 4:10 Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.

Episode Excerpts:

Video Segment: (2:10 – 2:43) Tai is going to be a pastor. He always knew that's what he wanted to be "God's man". And I thought ministry was like, the only way for me to have a meaningful life that God cared about. But I really want something different. And I feel guilty for, for having my own, not my own desires, but having other dreams. Having other goals. I don't want to be a missionary. I'm really good with money. And business. But - is that what I'm supposed to be doing with my life?

Video Segment: (2:47 – 3:16) “One bad way of thinking is that some things are sacred, and they matter to God, while other things are secular, and they don’t matter to God. The problem with this way of thinking is that it would mean most of life is secular. We spend most of our time going to school, working, walking the dog, working out, or eating. So most of us feel a little bit frustrated, because we think our life and work don’t really matter in the grand scheme of eternal life.”

Video Segment: (4:39 – 4:47) I just want God to tell me if this is supposed to be what I'm supposed to do. If this is my purpose, like please, show me.

Video Segment: (6:00 – 6:43) I’m gonna bloom where I’m planted. What?! I'm serious. I'm gonna bloom where I'm planted. I don't need to go anywhere else to be my best self. You all haven't seen the best of Emma. Yeah but what if you were planted in the wrong spot. What if you're a southern flower planted in the city? Not everyone gets to make a career out of their passion - but I'm not here on accident. I'm here on purpose. And God doesn't make mistakes. So wherever I am. Wherever I'm at - God will use it. I can take my circumstances and do something.

Notable Quotes

- Ordinary work matters to God because ordinary people matter to God. *Courtney Reissig*



- The place God calls you to is the place where your great love and the world’s great hunger meet. *Frederick Buechner*
- Wherever you are, be all there. Live to the hilt every situation you believe to be the will of God. *Jim Elliot*
- Work is not, primarily, the thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do. It is, or it should be, the full expression of the worker’s faculties ... the medium in which he offers himself to God. *Dorothy Leigh Sayers*
- If God is sovereign over all things and there is not one square inch that he does not call “Mine!” we cannot separate our work from God’s sovereignty. *Alicia Flatt*
- All work done well and for his glory is Christian work. *Dorothy Leigh Sayers*
- Any vocation can glorify God and...a calling is the intersection of your strengths and interests coupled with where God wants or need you most—a place that may change over the course of your life. *Bonnie Wurzbacher, former Coca Cola and World Vision executive*
- When you discover what you’re going to be in life, set out to do it as if God Almighty had called you at this particular moment in history to do just that. Set out to do a good job and do it so well that the living, the dead or the unborn couldn’t do it any better. *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Additional Resources to Explore

1. **Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Work*** (Penguin Books, 2014)
2. **Dan Doriani, “Your Job Well Done: Why Good Work Matters to God”**, [desiringgod.org](https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/your-job-well-done), August 12, 2020. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/your-job-well-done>
3. **Alicia Flatt, “The Commons: Cultivate Your Calling,”** *Comment Magazine*, June 1, 2017. <https://comment.org/the-commons-cultivate-your-calling/>
4. **Mark R. Shaw, *Work, Play, Love: A Visual Guide to Calling, Career and the Mission of God*** (IVPress, 2014)
5. **Amy Sherman, “Reconnecting Work and Church,”** *Comment Magazine*, December 26, 2011. <https://comment.org/reconnecting-work-and-church/>



“Purpose” Leader Study Guide

LEADER
TOOLS

RESOURCES

6. **J. B. Wood, “How Do We Know Our Calling in the Workplace,”** Theology of Work/The High Calling video, <https://youtu.be/Ujo14WvCwe4>
7. **“A Christian Worldview on Business: An Interview with Bonnie Wurzbacher of Coca Cola,”** Theology of Work/The High Calling article, <https://www.theologyofwork.org/the-high-calling/blog/christian-worldview-business-interview-bonnie-wurzbacher-coca-cola>
8. **Martin Luther King, Jr. “What is Your Life’s Blueprint?”**, an aspirational address to the students of Barrett Junior High School in Philadelphia, 1967, <https://youtu.be/kmsAxX84cjQ>