

## Work Matters

**OVERVIEW:** Chances are, the members of your group come from a wide range of spiritual and professional backgrounds. Some may attend churches that frequently discuss the integration of faith and work, while others may never have looked deeply at the theology of work. The discussions in the Theological Foundations series are designed to engage people at any stage of understanding, to help them live before Christ in all of life and equip them to share these principles with others. If certain group members understand these principles well, invite them to facilitate elements of the conversation with you.

This first discussion guide centers on the opening pages of Scripture and introduces the “Creation Mandate”, God’s charge to join him in caring for and developing the world.

**Optional reading:** Encourage your group members to read Genesis 1-3 before the meeting. Encourage members to look for ways they see work portrayed.

Have the group read “Created to Work” an 5-page excerpt from Tom Nelson’s book *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work* before your 2nd meeting.

- What did you learn about work growing up?
- What did your parents teach you about work (or model through their words and actions)?
- If you attended a church, what did religious leaders communicate about work?
  
- How have these influences shaped the way you look at work today? What questions do you have about the role faith plays in your professional life?

### Genesis 1:26-31

- What stands out to you in these verses?

#### 1. We are created to bear God’s image: *Imago Dei*

vv 27-28 - God says: “**Let us make human beings in our image**, make them reflecting our nature **so they can be responsible** for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, and, yes, **Earth itself**, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth.”

- In the opening chapters of Genesis, we see God working. In fact, his work is described using the Hebrew word *mlkh*, which is also used to describe ordinary human work.
- We’re created in God’s image for a purpose—to be responsible for Earth and all the creatures on it. We reveal God’s attributes through our work.

#### 2. The first instructions given to men and women are to work alongside God in the care and cultivation of the Earth. “Creation Mandate”

“God’s charge to our first parents was to ‘transform untamed nature into a social environment’ by cultural formation that fits God’s design.” - Richard Mouw<sup>i</sup>

- This is an amazing privilege and responsibility – God invites us to partner with him and we relate to him as we work together.
- o In what ways do you reflect God’s character in your work?

**Genesis 2:15** “Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to **cultivate** it and **keep** it.”

### **3. Our work is to help creation flourish by CULTIVATING (developing resources) and CARING for it.**

- Note: Some biblical translations use the word “dominion” which has negative cultural connotations (i.e. selfish exploitation of the Earth and its resources) but dominion simply means to exercise power and authority.
- This is a role that applies to all of life, at any age, role, or life stage – gives dignity and beauty to everyday (not “secular” and “spiritual”)
- Life in its ideal state involves work – work is a positive, blessed thing. Notice: These instructions are given before the fall. Work isn’t a curse! It’s a way we reflect God, experience him, and accomplish his purposes.

“Work doesn’t come in after a golden age of leisure. It was part of God’s perfect design for human life, because we were made in God’s image, and part of his glory and happiness is that he works, as the Son of God, who said, ‘My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.’ (John 5:17)”

- Tim Keller<sup>ii</sup>

- o How do these verses challenge society’s often negative view of work? (i.e. it’s a hassle, a necessary evil, or a curse.)
- o Think of your whole life (not just your profession) – where do you see yourself partnering with God in developing and caring for creation?

### **4. Work is a form of WORSHIP**

- The language of work as cultivation and creation in Genesis 2:15 is embedded in the Hebrew word *avodah*, which when translated means “to cultivate.”
- In the Old Testament, *avodah* refers to “work,” “service,” or “craftsmanship” but it is also translated as “worship.”

“Though there are distinct nuances to *avodah*, a common thread of meaning emerges where work, worship, and service are inextricably linked and intricately connected. The various usages of this Hebrew work found first in Genesis 2:15 tell us that God’s original design and desire that our work and our worship would be a seamless way of living. Properly understood, our work is to be thoughtfully woven into the integral fabric of Christian vocation, for God designed and intended our work, our vocational calling, to be an act of God-honoring worship.”

- Tom Nelson<sup>iii</sup>

- Theologians refer to a “sacred–secular divide” which causes Christians to see religious activity as more important or “spiritual” than the work they do everyday. How do the principles we examined today bridge this divide?
- What do these verses reveal about the significance of your work? How does your work fit into God’s grand design?
- What might it look like for your work to be a form of worship?

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<sup>i</sup> Plantinga, Cornelius. *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living*.

<sup>ii</sup> Keller, Tim. *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work*.

<sup>iii</sup> Nelson, Tom. *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work*.