EVERYDAY WORKS
Rethinking What You Do and Why It Matters for the Kingdom
A Talking Points Curriculum | Grand Rapids Theological Seminary
PART 1: WORK IS GOOD

“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” – Genesis 1:31
INTRODUCTION

Most of us work day-in and day-out to pay the bills, keep the house in order and fulfill our daily obligations. For some, work is mundane and feels meaningless. For others, it brings joy and fulfillment. Some are paid with large salaries and benefits, while others do their work for no compensation at all. Still others are looking for work.

Wherever you are in this, work and faith can feel like separate worlds. Work is what you do all week; faith is what you do on Sundays or whenever you can find time to read, pray or serve. When we think this way, our lives can feel out of balance. Too much time goes to work and not enough to faith. Some can make adjustments to read, pray or serve more (some may even work for a church!). Others cannot make these adjustments and feel guilty for not doing work that honors God, or they feel bitterness that God doesn’t seem to care about them or what they have to offer.

What if the dichotomy we’ve created between work and faith doesn’t exist?

What if God believes that your work, not just your Sunday worship, is sacred?

God created you with specific gifts and abilities that others need, and He wants you to use them. Your work may actually be the best way for you to show God’s love and care for the world.

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Panel Discussion
Available online at cornerstone.edu/everyday-works.
ENJOY GOD’S GOOD WORLD

Video clips 1-2 are taken from this presentation.

“We often struggle with the value of work, but we also struggle with pleasure. Can we really have and enjoy nice things, or are these in conflict with following Jesus?”

– Mike Wittmer²
INTRODUCTION

In Genesis, we read that God created the world, and it was good in His eyes. Did this change when Adam and Eve sinned and work became toil? The Apostle John wrote that “God so loved the world” that He sent His Son to save it, but He also said that we must “not love the world” (John 3:16; 1 John 2:15). This can be confusing. The word “worldly” has negative connotations, but we all know the joy of earthly pleasures like good food and a job well done.

“How do we fit this big gospel into the small world of everyday? Sometimes it doesn’t seem like it fits.”

– Mike Wittmer

Heavenly purpose and earthly pleasure go together. This is critical for seeing earthly things like work the way God sees them. God actually wants us to enjoy His good creation and to understand that even work is a gift from Him. He wants us to use His gifts for His glory and for the common good of everyone around us.

OPENING QUESTION

What is your “everyday work,” including the paid and unpaid tasks you do day-in and day-out? Identify the two things that consume most of your time. Would you say you enjoy these things, or are they more of a necessity?
Creation is Good (15 MINUTES)

In this video clip, Mike Wittmer walks through the story of Scripture, showing that creation is good and that God wants His people to enjoy the gifts He provides. The Bible, like any other book, has a plot, and we need to understand each part of the story in light of the whole thing.

This video clip is part of the presentation “Enjoy God’s Good World” by Dr. Mike Wittmer, available at www.cornerstone.edu/everyday-works.
REFLECT AND DISCUSS

After you watch the video clip, reflect on and discuss the following questions with your group.

When you hear the word “worldly,” what comes to your mind? How have the ideas discussed by Dr. Wittmer made you rethink your view of “worldly things”?

What are some of the “good gifts” in your life, and what are some things that “matter more”? What are some ways you can be tempted to let those good gifts become idols in your life?
Creation is Home (16 MINUTES)

In this video clip, Mike Wittmer shows that humans are created for a physical earth. This is our home, and God wants us to flourish here. But He doesn’t ask us to do it alone. He is with us, redeeming all things and removing all of the effects of sin and evil.

This video clip is part of the presentation “Enjoy God’s Good World” by Dr. Mike Wittmer, available at www.cornerstone.edu/everyday-works.

“Heaven is not our home. Jesus is our home.” —Mike Wittmer
REFLECT AND DISCUSS

After you watch the video clip, reflect on and discuss the following questions with your group.

Heaven is not our final goal, but rather a renewed and restored earth with Jesus. How does this make you rethink old assumptions, and what difference could it make for the value of your everyday work?

How real does the statement “Jesus is my home” feel to you right now? How might God be inviting you to find your identity and purpose more fully in Jesus Christ?
PRAYER

Father, help me enjoy and appreciate the beautiful world You have made. Show me the difference between the impact sin has on Your world and the beauty of what You created. Help me remember that what You created was pure and is a gift to enjoy. But may I never turn Your gifts into idols that replace You or crowd out my obedience to You. Lead me to enjoy Your good creation. And may it draw me to love You even more deeply. Amen.
DEFINING TERMS | NEW CREATION

When God made the earth, He said it was good. However, due to the Fall, sin has entered and tainted this good world. Sometimes when we imagine heaven, we think of it in terms of escape from the tainted things on earth. We assume or perhaps wonder if God is abandoning His creation, as if it was a failed plan He is giving up on. The biblical teaching, though, is that God desires to bring restoration to His creation and bring about “a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1). This new creation will be our home. It will not be an ethereal location in the sky, but a new and restored earth.

EXTRAS | NEED SOMETHING MORE?

If you have difficulty embracing the view that “creation is good” or “creation is home,” check out two video clips included in the extras.

- “Two Extremes to Avoid” (14 minutes) – In this clip, Dr. Wittmer explains in more depth why creation is good, and how philosophies like Gnosticism have impacted Christian thinking even today. The Apostles’ Creed was written to help us with this very issue!

- “How to Read Tough Bible Passages Correctly” (15 minutes) – In this clip, Dr. Wittmer explains some of the common mistakes we often make when reading passages like 1 John 2:15-17, 1 Peter 2:11, Colossians 3:1-2, Philippians 3:20, 2 Corinthians 4:18 and others. (Hint: Distinguish between “things” and “actions”!)
What’s the point?

Can we love God with our whole hearts and still enjoy our lives here on earth? Many people who want to put Jesus first and “store up treasures in heaven” read certain passages of Scripture like Colossians 3:1-5 or 1 John 2:15-17 and conclude that anything that is worldly or earthly should be rejected or at least minimized. Their priorities should be focused only on “heavenly” things (e.g., God, Bible reading, prayer, witnessing) because enjoying worldly or earthly pleasures is less valuable to God and a distraction to spiritual growth or mission. Unless they work for a church or Christian ministry, they wonder if their work is unimportant in God’s eyes. Dr. Wittmer points out that this way of thinking makes the mistake of confusing actions with things. These scriptures warn against worldly, earthly actions we must avoid (e.g., sinful desires and behaviors) but not against worldly, earthly things that are good and natural features of human life (e.g., good food, meaningful work and recreation). Dr. Wittmer warns that confusing these things runs the risk of no longer enjoying the good things of creation—the things God wants us to enjoy with thanksgiving (1 Timothy 4:4). We fail to love God fully when we refuse to enjoy His good gifts—including the gift of our everyday work.

An important point here is that Scripture never teaches that the ultimate destination of followers of Jesus is “heaven,” as in some ethereal place high up in the sky. This view is more similar to Platonic Gnosticism than it is to biblical Christianity. Gnosticism taught that anything physical (e.g., the earth, our bodies, physical pleasure) is inherently evil, and that the goal of life is to escape. Christianity has had trouble avoiding this mistake ever since the first century, including today. The Christian hope is not that we will be taken away from this world (earth), but that Jesus will come here, cleanse our world from sin and live with us forever. When we die, we “go home to be with Jesus,” but when He returns we will be at home with Him on a redeemed, restored earth. We wait for Jesus’ return so that we can live the physical human lives we were created to live. In other words, Jesus is our relational “home” (the Person we’re created for) and earth is our physical home (the place we’re created for). The biblical story of Creation-Fall-Redemption helps us keep that hope straight.

With that said, Dr. Wittmer encourages us to remember the tensions in the biblical story. He says, “All things matter, but some things matter more. Some things matter more, but everything still counts.” While we remind ourselves that God wants us to enjoy the earthly pleasures of this world, He also wants us to avoid the temptation of turning those pleasures into idols. Our hearts are idol factories, so even while we enjoy God’s good gifts, we should never let them replace Him in our hearts. Likewise, as we embrace Jesus’ mission of redemption in the world, we want to follow Him and always give priority to the things that matter more (e.g., salvation). Scripture never tells us we need to pick between earthly pleasure and heavenly purpose. We can hold on to both extremes. The resurrected Jesus did exactly that (John 21:1-14).
What’s the push back?

A common criticism of these ideas is that this view of creation risks merely justifying human excess at the expense of sacrificing to serve and promote the gospel. Enjoying human pleasure doesn’t sound like denying yourself for Jesus. Critics may view it as simply a way for us to avoid feeling guilty for pursuing our hobbies while avoiding other forms of gospel ministry. However, we must remember the purpose of creation. God’s design in Genesis 1-2 clearly shows His desire for humanity to enjoy what their Creator provided. For more information, check out the extras listed on page 19.

For more discussion of this material, check out the panel discussion with Dr. Mike Wittmer and other experienced leaders. You can find this additional resource at www.cornerstone.edu/everyday-works.

Additional discussion questions:

Talk about a time you felt guilt for delighting in creation through a hobby or activity you enjoy. Explain how this tension affected your attitude toward that activity.

How can that same activity help you enjoy and participate in God’s creation, and how does it influence your relationship with God and others?

What is a common way of viewing heaven? What terms are typically used to describe it, and how might these terms misrepresent God’s promise of a restored earth?

Think about your favorite hobby or activity (this could be your everyday work, if you enjoy it). What can you do to direct praise to God for this gift? What steps must you take to make sure it does not become an idol in your life?

HELPFUL SCRIPTURES

- **CREATION IS GOOD** – Genesis 1-2; John 1:14, 21:1-14; 1 Timothy 4:1-8; Colossians 2:20-23

- **CREATION IS HOME** – Genesis 3:17, 4:10-11, 6:7, 9:8-11; Revelation 21:3

- **LOVING GOD’S CREATION IN THE RIGHT WAY** – John 3:16; 1 John 2:15-17; 1 Timothy 6:17

FURTHER READING

* Becoming Worldly Saints: Can You Serve Jesus and Still Enjoy Your Life? by Michael Wittmer

* Creation Regained by Al Wolters

WORK IS A CALLING

Video clips 3-4 are taken from this presentation.

“Instead of starting at the end of the story with redemption, what if we started at the beginning with creation?”

– Mike Wittmer
Many times when we meet someone for the first time, we ask them a simple question, “What do you do?” While we know that this is equivalent to asking someone what their occupation is, we ought to ask ourselves, “Is this the right question?” When meeting another person, would a more appropriate question be, “How do you serve?” or “How does your work help others?” These questions highlight the goodness in even the most menial jobs. They recognize the dignity of every role no matter how big or small. This mindset is closer to the biblical view of work as “calling.”

“Creation contains the meaning of life.”
– Mike Wittmer

God ordained even the simple act of work from the beginning of creation. Adam was called to rule the earth, name the animals and care for the Garden of Eden. It was quite a job. But it never became difficult or toil until sin entered the picture.
Called to Love and Serve (13 MINUTES)

In this video clip, Mike Wittmer explains that every person in the world has a calling—even several callings. Pastors and missionaries are not the only ones who are called. We are all called to love God more than anything else and to deny ourselves, that is, to set aside our own interests in order to love and serve others.

This video clip is part of the presentation “Work is a Calling” by Dr. Mike Wittmer, available at www.cornerstone.edu/everyday-works.
REFLECT AND DISCUSS

After you watch the video clip, reflect on and discuss the following questions with your group:

Reflect on this quote from St. Augustine: “You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You.” Do you feel this in your own life? Why or why not?

Give an example of a time when you denied yourself (set aside your interests for the sake of others). How did it give you a deeper sense of life, meaning or purpose?
Called to Work and Rest (15 MINUTES)

In this video clip, Mike Wittmer describes two more callings that every person has. God created each of us to rule over the earth on His behalf. One way we do that is through our everyday work. However, God also calls us to rest and to remember that we are not defined by our work. Our identity is found not in what we do but in Who we know.

This video clip is part of the presentation “Work is a Calling” by Dr. Mike Wittmer, available at www.cornerstone.edu/everyday-works.
REFLECT AND DISCUSS

After you watch the video clip, reflect on and discuss the following questions with your group.

What are your callings? List as many as possible. Which ones are covenantal, and which are not?

How is your occupation a way you can love God, serve your neighbor and contribute to culture and society?
Father, help me understand that it is Your desire to work for Your glory and honor in whatever we do. You care about my work, the way I relate to others and how I steward Your resources. You have called me to show Your love to the world in every area of my life. I pray that You will guide me and empower me in every area of my life so that this calling is visible and honoring to You. Thank you for the purpose You have given me! Amen.
DEFINING TERMS | The Kingdom of God

As you rethink what you do and why it matters for the kingdom, it’s important to ask the question, “What is the kingdom of God anyway?” Scripture is clear that the kingdom is no one nation, but rather something much bigger. In the extras, Dr. Wittmer spends 12 minutes defining the kingdom. Here are a few highlights:

- The kingdom is the reign of Christ over the whole world (all nations) and over the whole person (every part of our lives).
- The kingdom is already here and it is not yet. Jesus Christ launched the kingdom through His ministry and we taste the kingdom when we surrender to His Lordship, but the kingdom is not yet here in its fullness.
- We do not build the kingdom. We receive and bear witness to the kingdom.
- The kingdom is broader than the Church. It’s as large as creation.
- The Church is the center or headquarters of the kingdom.

For more on this topic, check out the video clip “What is the Kingdom?” (12 minutes).

*Graphic adapted from “Becoming Worldly Saints,” p. 157. Used with permission.*
Video clips 3-4 are part of the presentation “Work Is a Calling” by Dr. Mike Wittmer, given at a workshop in Grand Rapids, Mich. You can watch his full lecture at www.cornerstone.edu/everyday-works.

What’s the point?
The main point of this presentation is that humanity is called. Every single person is called. Pastors and missionary workers are not the only people called to serve God with their whole lives. Everyone is called. God invites and expects us to live out the purpose for which He created us. Jesus taught that the two greatest commandments (think: callings) are to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind...[and I]love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37, 39). Those two callings are universal and primary. God is number one, therefore His kingdom must permeate our lives. Next to God, loving and serving others is primary. Dr. Wittmer clarifies that among our human relationships we can and should rightly give some relationships greater attention than others. We are in covenantal relationships with our church (followers of Christ) and with our family. Husbands and wives should prioritize each other and parents should prioritize their children.

In addition to these two primary callings, humanity is also called to work and rest. Sometimes we can have a tendency to look at our work or hobbies as things that are outside of our calling or less important than going to church or serving in a ministry capacity. If this were the case, though, most of life would be wasted on unimportant things, which is exactly how many Christians feel. As Dr. Wittmer teaches in this session, everything is part of our calling from God as individuals. We are called to love God and serve our neighbor through our everyday work, whether we have our “dream job” or are simply doing whatever work we can find. Theologians call it the “cultural mandate,” which is our calling to take care of and develop God’s creation. God invites and expects us to work for the common good. When we do, we worship God and love our neighbor in very practical ways. At the same time, Dr. Wittmer points out that God also calls us to rest, to remember that our identity is not found in what we do but in our relationship with Him. This balance between work and rest helps us to love and serve our neighbor while also keeping our hearts and identities centered on God. Rest reminds us that we are finite and dependent on God, which frees us to enjoy God’s good creation.

What’s the push back?
A common criticism of this session may be that some callings—pastoral ministry or missions—are higher and more important than other callings, and we must be careful not to discourage people from going into ministry. This is absolutely true and is presented by Dr. Wittmer toward the end of the full presentation. He presents the dichotomy between two biblical truths: that there is something unique about leading as a pastor, but that this does not minimize the value of other callings. There are high standards for those in pastoral leadership, but those who love God and serve their neighbor outside of formal ministry are no less called by God in those vocations. Christ asks all of His followers to pick up their cross daily and follow Him. It is the most important calling we could have, and it is given to everyone who puts their faith in Him.
For more discussion of this material, check out the panel discussion with Dr. Mike Wittmer and other experienced leaders. You can find this additional resource at www.cornerstone.edu/everyday-works.

Additional discussion questions:

In what ways is it true that you love God more than everything else? In what ways is it not true? What are some specific ways you could make God and His kingdom permeate your life more fully?

(Note: This question is not intended to produce guilt but to encourage honest reflection on God’s role in your life. God knows your heart, and He loves you despite your imperfections. If you are unsure about this, see Romans 5:8 and 1 John 3:16. God is looking for people who will be honest with Him and with themselves. Growth often comes when we acknowledge what is true and ask God to work in our hearts. Take a moment to ask God to show you specific ways you can make Him more central in your everyday work.)

When you hear the word “calling,” what does it make you think of? Have you ever thought of your current occupation, your friendships or the way you interact with your family as part of your calling or do you believe your calling is still somewhere out there that you have not achieved yet? How does the teaching in this session encourage or challenge you?

How might embracing Sabbath rest help you to anchor your identity in Christ rather than in what you’re able to accomplish? In what ways is rest both appealing and difficult to embrace?

HELPFUL SCRIPTURES

- Creation contains the meaning of life – Genesis 1:27; Matthew 13:33, 44-46
- Our call is to serve others – Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 16:24
- We are called to cultivate the earth – Genesis 2:15; Colossians 3:17, 23-24
- We are called to rest – Genesis 2:1-3; Deuteronomy 5:12-15

FURTHER READING

Becoming Worldly Saints: Can You Serve Jesus and Still Enjoy Your Life? by Michael Wittmer

Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Work by Tim Keller

Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work by Tom Nelson