**Introduction**

1. All work is good.

*In the beginning, there was work.*

*God called man to join him in his work.*

* ***Gen 1:28****—God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”*

*Work is not a necessary evil or a punishment or a means to an end.*

*Work is not sacred or secular.*

*The distinction between sacred and secular has become deeply entrenched in our thinking.*

* *In the 16th century, Luther challenges this notion: “Therefore I advise no one to enter any religious order or the priesthood, indeed, I advise everyone against it—unless he is forearmed with this knowledge and understands that the works of monks and priests, however holy and arduous they may be, do not differ one whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic laborer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks, but that all works are measured before God by faith alone.”[[1]](#footnote-1)*

2. All work is a means of exercising God’s providence.

This point flows from the first. All work is good and expresses this goodness by exercising God’s providence.

* Letter to Diognetus: “For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, *inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life*. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives.”

Vocation comes from the Latin word *vocare*, which means “to call,” and refers to one’s calling.

* Calvin, similarly, argued: “We know that people were created for the express purpose of being employed in labor of various kinds, and that no sacrifice is more pleasing to God than when every person applies diligently to his or her own calling, and endeavors to live in such a manner as to contribute to the general advantage.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

All work, therefore, is a means of exercising God’s providence.

* Providence refers to not merely his sovereign rule over all but how he sustains and nourishes all the created world.

Your work is part of the massive, interdependent work God is doing in and throughout the world around you.

* Psalm 145:16—*You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.*
* As Luther provocatively writes, “God himself will milk the cows through him whose vocation that is. He who engages in the lowliness of his work performs God’s work, be he lad or king.”
* “God has ordered human society in such a way that we all depend on each other. Before we give thanks for our daily bread, somebody has to have baked it. In fact, before a slice of honey oatmeal appears on our plate, a number of farmers, millers, bakers, distributors, drivers, grocers, and others have had to work together in order to supply our need.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

So, *how does your work fit in to God’s providential governance of the work? How does your work help the work function better?*

3. All work is a means of worship.

This point flows from the previous two. As all work is good and is a means of excercising God’s providence, all work is a means of worshipping and honoring God.

* As Dorothy Sayres once pointed out, “The church’s approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him to not be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours and to come to church on Sundays. What the church should be telling him is this: that the very first demand his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables.”[[4]](#footnote-4)
* In addition, Leland Ryken adds, "Most Christians believe they can be a Christian at work. To do so involves being a diligent worker, being honest in one’s dealings with an employer, and witnessing to fellow workers. But this still leaves the work itself untouched by one’s Christian faith. The original Protestants were right in going beyond this and claiming that the work itself is a spiritual issue and a means of glorifying God. We can be Christian not only in our work but through our work if we view our work as an obedient response to God’s calling.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

As we understand God has called us to our work, we can be worshipful through our work.

However, while a means of worship, work continually exposes our idolatry.

* “It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give.”[[6]](#footnote-6)
* Martin Luther articulated something amazing here. He saw that making an idol and trying to please God through our works are essentially the same thing.[[7]](#footnote-7)
* Luther: “If we do not believe that God is gracious to us and is pleased with us, or if we presumptuously expect to please Him only through and after our works, then it is all pure deception, outwardly honoring God, but inwardly setting up self as a false god…”

Work is, therefore, a continual means of worship.

* Writing in the 4th century, Augustine articulated this in a striking way: “Two cities, then, have been created by two loves: that is, the earthly by love of self extending even to contempt of God, and the heavenly by love of God extending even to contempt of self. The one, therefore, glories in itself, the other in the Lord; the one seeks glory from men, the other finds its highest glory in God, the Witness of our conscience. The one lifts up its head in its own glory; the other says to its God, ‘Thou are my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.’ In the Earthly City, princes are as much mastered by the lust for mastery as the nations which they subdue are by them; in the Heavenly, all serve one another in charity, rulers by their counsel and subjects by their obedience. The one city loves its own strength as displayed in its mighty men; the other says to its God, ‘I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength.’”[[8]](#footnote-8)
* Ephesians 6:5-9—*Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.*

4. All work is a means of hoping in eternity.

What would you do if you knew tomorrow the world would end?

One thing we do know about the future: All our work will be fulfilled in the new heavens and new earth.

* “Swords will have to be turned back into pruning shears, switchblades into paring knifes, and spears into garden hoes. High-powered dope-running speedboats . . . will have to be reclaimed for teaching poor children to water-ski. In the new heaven and new earth, intercontinental ballistic missile silos will be transformed into training tanks for scuba divers.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

In this new creation, all of our dreams for our work will be brought to fullness.

* “If the God of the Bible exists, and there is a True Reality beneath and behind this one, and this life is not the only life, then every good endeavor, even the simplest ones, pursued in response to God’s calling, can matter forever. That is what the Christian faith promises. ‘In the Lord, your labor is not in vain.’”[[10]](#footnote-10) Keller

Conclusion

Until then, we press on to work.

1. Martin Luther, from Hugh Whelchel’s book *How Then Should We Work*, 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. John Calvin, from Hugh Whelchel’s book *How Then Should We Work*, 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cornelius Plantigua, *Engaging God’s World,* 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Dorothy Sayres, “Why Work.” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Leland Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, *xvii*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 132-133. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Augustine, *The City of God*, 632. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Plantigua, *Engaging God’s World*, 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Keller*, Every Good Endeavor*, 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)