

Session 2

VOCATIONAL FLOURISHING

Genesis 2:15; Proverbs 12:11; Proverbs 16:3

Memory Verse

*The Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden
to work it and watch over it.*

- Genesis 2:15, CSB



Vocational Flourishing

THEOLOGICAL THEME: God created us to work hard. We don't flourish in our work apart from Him.

CALL TO ACTION: Give intentional focus to the Lord this week as you give your best effort in the places He has put you.

Introduction

When you think of great Christian authors of the early twentieth century, your mind may call up the great C.S. Lewis, who penned beloved books like *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Screwtape Letters*, and *Mere Christianity*.

But there is another notable Christian author who lived during this time period whom you may not have heard of: Dorothy Sayers (actually, she was a friend of C.S. Lewis, and, if you can believe it, more popular than him in their day).

Dorothy's written work includes the wildly popular Lord Peter Wimsey mystery novels, and a 12-play volume account of the four Gospels called "The Man Born to Be King," first released as a radio program (a work C.S. Lewis personally treasured). Amongst the other works of this great writer is a powerful essay called "Why Work?"

Why work, indeed?

For so many Americans, work means drudgery. Soul-sucking hours trapped in a cubicle. Navigating a minefield of passive aggressive emails. A to-do list that woefully never ends. Making sacrifices to make a buck. A set of challenges that doesn't wane, even when you reach "that" job (the one where you hoped the grass might be greener).

There is no denying that nearly all meaningful work is challenging in some way, but Dorothy held a higher view of work than popular culture.

In her essay, she argued that we must understand work theologically, a natural byproduct of being made in the image of God who Himself works and creates. She believed that we could find fulfillment in hard work when it allows us to embrace the gifts and talents God gave us (and that it was better to be satisfied by a job well done than the paycheck that might come with it). She urged readers not to draw a line between “religious” and “secular” work, saying that we can (and should!) still serve the kingdom even in marketplace jobs.

Dorothy’s essay called for an attitude revolution in her day (it was written during the height of World War II).¹

 What is the worst or least favorite job you’ve ever had? Why?

 What is the best job you’ve ever had?

 What do you think it looks like to flourish in your work?

Session Summary

We’re studying Proverbs in this series, but before we dive into how Proverbs informs our thoughts on work today, we’re going to make a stop in Genesis to read about God’s design and designation of work. God gifted humans with meaningful work before the fall, so work isn’t a consequence of sin as many believe.

Scripture teaches the importance of hard work. It is a vehicle God uses to provide for us. Conversely, intentional slacking is foolish. Of equal importance is putting Christ first in all things (yes, including our work!), and trusting Him to lead us on the right path.

1. Work is Created (Genesis 2:15)

 Why is it significant that God gave people work before the fall?

 How might this reshape your view of work?

We are going to dive into biblical wisdom from Proverbs and explore the idea of work and what it might mean to flourish in our vocation, but first, let's get the lay of the land by visiting work's origin story back in Genesis.

So often, we view work, and the toiling we will do in the act, as a tragic consequence of the fall. To be fair, God's words in Genesis 3:17-19 can give that impression. When we picture Adam and Eve in the pre-fall garden, we might conjure up serene relaxation, reminiscent of a Renaissance painting. For surely the garden was the most peaceful place to exist so far, right? While it certainly was a place of joy and peace, there was already work.

God put man in the garden to work before the fall. Good, fulfilling, meaningful work existed before the consequences of the fall. To truly flourish in our work, we must first embrace the truth that we were, quite literally, created to work.

The creation account also says of humankind that we are created in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27). One implication of this is we are endowed with the capacity to mirror the characteristics of God. This encompasses a wealth of wonderful things, and one of them is the capacity to work.

 What are some ways we might image God in our daily work?

And let's note here that "work" might not mean earning a paycheck in a 9-to-5. For you, maybe it looks like staying home and caring for and managing your family and household. Or maybe you're retired and your "work" is now serving in a volunteer capacity at church or stepping in to help care for ailing parents or grandchildren. This is work that the Lord sees and values. We can glorify Him and flourish in these paths and seasons of life, too.

2. Plenty (Proverbs 12:11)

 What does this verse teach us about work?

 How do you think this applies to us in 2026?


Have you ever wondered why there is so much farming imagery in the Bible?

Agriculture is central to the biblical narrative because it was familiar. As any good teacher knows, connecting to a concept your audience knows well helps them learn, and for this mostly rural, agrarian culture, what they knew was the importance of working the land.²

This concept was so important to Solomon that he wrote of it multiple times (Proverbs 10:4-5; 14:23; 28:19) throughout the book of Proverbs. Solomon's message across the board is clear: working hard, something we are created for, enables us to care for ourselves and our family. When we give into the temptation to not work hard, we squander the gifts God has given and fall into sin.

There are many biblical examples of those who worked hard and honored God. Take Ruth, for example, a few generations before Solomon's time (Ruth was Solomon's great-great grandmother). For Ruth and Naomi, two widows with no family provision or protection, working the field was quite literally a matter of life and death. They relied on the Old Testament gleaning laws (which God put in place to care for the marginalized of society, like these women) to eat. The importance of hard work is reiterated in the New Testament, too, in places like 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12:

In fact, when we were with you, this is what we commanded you: "If anyone isn't willing to work, he should not eat." For we hear that there are some among you who are idle. They are not busy but busybodies. Now we command and exhort such people by the Lord Jesus Christ to work quietly and provide for themselves.

 What are some other examples you know of biblical wisdom or examples that encourage hard work?

We are meant to work, not chase fantasies and coast on the goodwill of others. We are meant to put forth effort to provide for ourselves and our families as we are able, and in times when that is genuinely not available to us, as some have experienced, Christian charity in community is meant to fill in the gaps (Think of all the ways we see the early church meeting tangible corporate needs in the New Testament!).

Working hard helps us flourish. As we called out earlier, if you stay at home caring for your family or caring for your household, you may not be earning a paycheck, but this is work. You are providing in a different, yet equally important, way that God uses for the benefit of your whole family.

3. Surrender (Proverbs 16:3)

 What do you think it means for our plans to “be established”?


 How do we commit our activities to the Lord when it comes to our work?

Have you ever made careful plans and then watched the situation unfold in a way that was not at all what you’d planned or hoped? This often happens in the working world and is a common human experience. It’s easy to run ahead of God, making a move before consulting Him, or making a decision purely from our own hearts.

Sometimes that works, sometimes it doesn’t, but this proverb teaches a different way. The NIV Application Commentary paraphrases this verse helpfully as:

Plan, pray, then act.³

It is smart to plan, but it is necessary to consult the Lord and then walk faithfully in whatever direction He has shown you. Sometimes that means saying no to a lucrative job offer. Sometimes that means walking through a situation that feels like failure, not working out like you wanted or hoped, because God has a better plan at work.

 What does it look like to submit your plans to the Lord daily?

When we trust the Lord with our decisions, including the decisions in our vocation, our plans are “established” (v. 3), or secure, not subject to destruction.⁴ We can walk out in faith knowing that God has a plan for our lives and that plan is good (Romans 8:28) and better than anything we could ever work up on our own. As we give over control, and truly trust in the Lord, we flourish with Him.

Conclusion


We started our conversation about work in the beginning. If we want to flourish in our work, we must first recognize that God created us to work. When He made us in His image, He gave us the capacity to mirror His characteristics, including the ability to work hard. He gifted humans with meaningful work before the fall, so we know it isn't simply a punishment. When we flip our attitude and see our work (whether that's in a traditional vocation or not) as something we were created for, we begin to see work for the opportunity it is, not just the to care for our family (and possibly others), but an opportunity to glorify God.


Scripture repeats the importance of working hard and not taking advantage of others' hospitality as a means of pursuing laziness. The result of hard work is we (and often others) are taken care of. Conversely, chasing worldly fantasies is foolish.

Hard work is not only a vehicle through which God provides for us (who do you think gave you that talent, or that opportunity?), it also honors God. Like Dorothy Sayers argued, we shouldn't draw a line between “religious” and “secular” work. No matter where you work, whether it comes attached to a paycheck or not, you have an opportunity to glorify God and further the Kingdom.

Another way we glorify God through our work is to trust Him with our plans and our path. Our primary motivator should be to live like and for Christ, and that should steer each of our decisions, including those having to do with our work. We can trust God to take care of us. To provide and guide us on a path that He's planned for our good. And when we're on this path? We are truly thriving.

 How does remembering that God Himself worked reshape your attitude toward daily tasks?

 What opportunities to serve and honor God exist in your current work? What does it mean to practically commit our activities to the Lord? How do we do that?

 How does living as hard workers who honor God give us opportunity to tell others about Him?

Memorize

The Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it.

- Genesis 2:15, CSB

References

1. https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/Why_Work_Dorothy_Sayers.pdf
2. R. L. Drouhard, "Agriculture," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Lexham Press, 2016).
3. Christopher A. Beetham and Nancy L. Erickson, eds., *The NIV Application Commentary on the Bible*, One-Volume Edition, NIV Application Commentary (Zondervan Academic, 2024), 504.
4. David K. Stabnow, "Proverbs," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 959.
5. *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.