

On Work

From the beginning, even before the fall, we were created to work.

[Genesis 2:15](#) The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Several proverbs describe cause and effect of diligence/sloth and prosperity/poverty, respectively.

[Proverbs 10:4](#) Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth.

However, beyond practical, material benefits, we see a lesson that we are expected to work hard, as working for the Lord, for the glory of God.

[Colossians 3:23-24](#) ²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

[Matthew 5:16](#) In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

We are expected to make use of what we're given ([Luke 19:11-27](#)) in proportion with what we're given ([Luke 12:48b](#)), i.e. to whom much is given, much will be required.

The word "vocation" derives from the Latin "vocare" (to call). Our work is literally referred to as our "calling" from God, whether we are called to full-time ministry or whether we are "[tentmakers](#)", a reference to Paul's tent making self-support ([Acts 18:1-3; 20:33-35](#)), more generally used to describe working while ministering so as to not burden others financially ([2 Thessalonians 3:8](#)).

One caveat: We are not defined by our work. The command of Sabbath rest was given in context to Hebrews in exodus from slavery as an exercise of liberation from work as identity. People should observe Sabbath time of rest from work to honor God, to assert an identity beyond work, and to allow restful time for renewal and reflection. (See Tim Keller's article "[Wisdom and Sabbath Rest](#)".)

In discussing work with students, I often use a Venn diagram I've [revised](#) for describing vocation/calling/purposeful work:





Note that the top and left ovals are what tend to be emphasized in individualistic, student-centered, Western educational systems. Much school counseling tends to be centered on the question “What do you enjoy, and how can you get good at it?” However, the bottom and right circles tend to reflect the needs of others as indicated by the job market. I am very thankful to have found my vocation at the central intersection of this Venn diagram. It is an ideal scenario I hope for others to find.

However, we do not know whether or not Paul enjoyed making tents and was good at it. In [1 Corinthians 9](#), Paul declared that he “would rather die than allow anyone to deprive [him] of this boast”, that he worked hard to offer the gospel, i.e. the good news of Jesus Christ, free of charge. He at least enjoyed this distinction. A life well-lived can consist of multiple, complementary work activities.

Finally, scriptures also teach that it is part of our faith to provide for one’s family if one can:

[1 Timothy 5:8](#) Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

In summary, our work is

- Part of the purpose of our creation,
- Causal to our prosperity,
- To be done with all your heart, as working for the Lord,
- In order to glorify the Lord,
- With expectation of diligent use of what we have been given (gifts, abilities, skills, time, energy),
- Without completely defining our identities,
- Finding productive intersection between who God has made us and what the world needs, and
- To the benefit of and provision for others, especially our relatives.

