



▶▶▶ Group Study Guide

WORK, WORSHIP, AND THE END OF GOD'S STORY:

A Bible Study on Work Based on the
Book of Revelation
by Mark D. Roberts



LIFE FOR LEADERS

INTRODUCTION TO LIFE FOR LEADERS STUDY GUIDE SERIES

The *Life for Leaders* Study Guide Series helps leaders connect their faith to their work. Whether you exercise leadership in business, education, arts, government, media, volunteer work, church, or family, *Life for Leaders* will guide you into deeper biblical understanding and more faithful living. It will help you integrate your faith with all you do.

The Study Guide Series is based on the *Life for Leaders* daily devotions (lifeforleaders.depre.org/devotionals/) produced by Fuller's Max De Pree Center for Leadership (depre.org). These online devotions are meant for individual reflection and prayer. The Study Guide Series offers a thorough rewrite of the daily devotions for use in small groups, classes, and other conversational settings. (If you're looking for thematic guides for personal devotions, check out the *Life for Leaders* Personal Devotions Series at store.depre.org/).

The *Life for Leaders* Study Guide Series can be a valuable resource for churches that are seeking to encourage and equip their members for living their faith in the marketplace.

Life for Leaders, in all of its forms, assumes that God speaks to us authoritatively through Scripture. It also assumes that God's Word addresses the real, pressing issues of our lives, including our work as leaders. The team that has written and produced this study guide and the rest of the *Life for Leaders* materials hopes we can help you grow in your relationship with God, so that you might know God more deeply and live out your faith in him more significantly.

May God bless you in your faith, work, leadership, and growth in Christ.

Mark D. Roberts

Principal Writer and Executive Editor of Life for Leaders



HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

This study guide has been written for use in a small group, perhaps at church or during lunch with some colleagues at work. If you're using this guide for personal study or for a larger class setting, you can adapt it as you see fit.

The study has ten sessions, each one meant to take a little less than an hour to complete. Of course, conversation about the theme of a session could take longer if you have the time.

If you are using this study guide in a group, I recommend that you develop the practice of reading the assigned Scripture passage out loud in the group, even if you have read and studied it in advance. When we hear the Bible read aloud, we discover things we would otherwise have missed.

The guide does not build in time for personal sharing and prayer, though these could surely be added to the end of the session. But I would strongly encourage you to spend some time in prayer responding specifically to the biblical text and theme for the session. Model

prayers at the end of each guide will help you do this.

The agenda and questions for each session are suggestions, not requirements. If a group session goes in other fruitful directions, I encourage you to move with the wind of the Spirit.



INTRODUCTION TO WORK, WORSHIP, AND THE END OF GOD'S STORY

I have a friend who reads novels in a most peculiar way. She begins with the final chapter. No kidding. She does this because she hates reading novels with sad endings. By reading the last chapter first, she knows in advance where the story is heading. If it ends sadly, then she'll move on to the next book.

I don't necessarily like sad endings either. But I can't imagine reading the last chapter of a novel first. For me, knowing the ending would usually ruin the story. It would take away the suspense and the joy of guessing where things are going. Now, I suppose I could still delight in creative descriptions and in curious characters. But I love being surprised by the twists and turns of a good story. Please don't tell me how it ends!

The Bible tells a story, a grand story that begins with creation and ends with new creation. Curiously, though, many Christians don't think of the Bible as a story. Or, if they do, they begin in Genesis 3 (sin) and end in the New Testament gospels and epistles, with the resurrection of Jesus and the assurance of personal forgiveness and salvation. It is unusual for Christians

to take seriously the foundational chapters of God's story, the creation account in Genesis 1-2 (though, I'm glad to say, more and more believers are paying close attention to Genesis). It is even more unusual for Christians to take seriously the concluding chapters of God's story, the new creation account in Revelation 21-22. Thus, without paying close attention to the opening and closing chapters of the Bible, we miss out on the fullness of God's story, overlooking God's grand intentions both for human life and for the whole cosmos.

I spent my first year of writing *Life for Leaders* devotions by focusing on Genesis. For about three months I slowly ambled through the first two chapters, the stories of creation. (You can find my devotions on Genesis at the [Life for Leaders website](#). You can read highlights from this series in the *Life for Leaders* study and devotional guides, called [Your Work, Your Purpose, and God's Glory](#).) After spending a year in Genesis, I jumped to Revelation 21-22. I began with Revelation 21 not because I undervalue the first twenty chapters of this stunning book, but because I



wanted to focus on the very end of God’s story, looking at how the end underscores key elements of the beginning.

To put it plainly, I believe that if we “get” the beginning of God’s story in Genesis 1-2, and if we “get” the ending of God’s story in Revelation 21-22, we will be prepared to understand the rest of the story correctly. If, on the contrary, we overlook the beginning and the end, our interpretation of the middle of God’s story will always be inadequate, if not mistaken.

In particular, the end of God’s story reiterates and expands upon what we see in Genesis about our purpose in life and how that purpose is tied to our work. Thus, a prayerful study of Revelation 21-22 will not only give us a window into the future, but also help us to live and work today with greater meaning, wisdom, and joy. So, in this case, if we read the ending of the story early, it won’t ruin the story. Rather, it will help us understand the whole story and its relevance to our lives.



SESSION 1: GOD IS MAKING EVERYTHING NEW

BEGIN WITH THE BIBLE

After opening with prayer dedicating the time to the Lord, read Revelation 21:1-5. If you have time, read all of Revelation 21.

QUESTIONS TO GET STARTED

- *As you read this passage of Scripture, what questions arise for you?*
- *What do you see in this passage that might be relevant to your work?*
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REFLECTIONS

During my years in Texas, I was amazed by the power of rain to renew the land. We might go for weeks or even months with very little precipitation. The grass would turn brown. The bushes would be covered with dust.

The trees would droop with thirst. The air would feel dry and sad. Then, a series of thunderstorms would blow through the Texas hill country and everything would change. New green grass would sprout up. Bushes and trees would become clean and vigorous. The air would be fresh and filled with the scent of a world reborn.

In Revelation 21, God plays the role of renewing rain, but much more profoundly. In v. 1, we see “a new heaven and a new earth,” which are, by implication, from God’s hand. In the fifth verse, God, who is seated on his heavenly throne, speaks, “I am making everything new!” What an astounding and inspiring affirmation! “I am making everything new!”

I am struck by two details of this statement. First, notice that God says “I am making everything new,” not “I made everything new.” The Greek present tense of “to make” could be rendered “I make all things new,” as in the classic King James Version. But almost all modern translations prefer the present progressive, “I am making,” which emphasizes the ongoing process of renewal. Yes, the new heaven and new earth are present



in John’s vision, but the renewal of all things isn’t finished. We wonder if, even as we participated in the completion of God’s first creation, we might have a role in the renewal that is to come.

Second, I am struck by the word “everything.” God is making “everything” new, *everything*. The Greek word behind this translation is *panta*, which can also be translated as “all things” (so the ESV, CEB, etc.). Notice, in particular, that God is not just renewing what we might call “spiritual things.” God is not just saving souls. Nor is God simply making human beings new and leaving the world in its old, broken state. No, the God who created all things good will, in his good time, make all things new.

I am impressed by the implicit value placed on *things* in this verse. This stands in contrast to what I was once taught about God’s relationship to the world. Where John 3:16 says that God loves the world, I was told that this means God loves only the people of the world, not the world itself. That may be what John is trying to convey in this passage, but the easy way in which some Christians deny the value of the world is unfortunate. Without denying God’s unique love for human beings, the biblical story that begins in Genesis and ends in Revelation strongly suggests that God does indeed care

deeply about the world, including the “things” of the world in addition to its human creatures. Remember, when God created all things, he observed that they are “very good” (Genesis 1:31). No doubt, his love for human beings is extraordinary. But this does not mean God ignores the value of his whole creation.

For those of us who work with the “things” of this world each day, the fact that God cares about these “things” can renew our sense of our work’s purpose and value. We realize that what we do each day truly matters to God. We wonder how we can do our work with the “things” entrusted to us in a way that gives pleasure to God and contributes to his purposes. Though we live in a world that has yet to be renewed by God, we can live now in light of the renewal that is coming.



QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

- *When you hear God say, “I am making all things new,” how do you respond? What are your thoughts? Feelings?*
- *When you think about the world, where do you feel strongly the need for divine renewal?*

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- *How about in your own life? Where do you need God to renew you today?*

TAKEAWAYS: SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT, SOMETHING TO DO

- *What is one thing you will take away from today's study? It could be a new thought or a tangible action step.*
- *A possibility: Look around you and give thanks to God for the "things" in your life.*

WRAPPING UP WITH PRAYER

As you conclude today's study, take a few moments to pray. I would encourage you to pray in two segments. First, pray specifically in response to your encounter with God's Word. Second, after you have done this, group members can share concerns and pray for each other.

Let the following prayer be a model for you:

Gracious God, thank you for the fact that you are making everything new. Thank you for caring about us and this world. Thank you for not leaving us in our brokenness, but seeking to make us whole through Christ.

Help me, Lord, to live each day in light of the future. May I value the things of this world as you value them. May I love the people of this world as you love them. Help me to do so today, in everything I do. Amen.

SOMETHING EXTRA

As we study passages from Revelation 21-22 in this guide, you might find helpful the commentary on Revelation produced by The Theology of Work Project. This commentary can be [found online for free](#). It is just one of the marvelous and vast collection of resources offered by the [Theology of Work Project](#).

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SESSION 2: WILL BACH'S BRANDENBURG CONCERTOS, THE GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE, AND THE IPHONE BE IN THE NEW JERUSALEM?

BEGIN WITH THE BIBLE



After opening with prayer dedicating the time to the Lord, read Revelation 21:22-27. If you have time, read all of Revelation 21.

QUESTIONS TO GET STARTED



- *What in this passage impresses you?*
- *What questions do you have about this passage?*

REFLECTIONS



As you have seen, the title of this study guide session is: “Will Bach’s Brandenburg Concertos, the Golden Gate Bridge, and the iPhone Be in the New Jerusalem?” Now, before you reject this devotion as downright silly, hang in there with me for a few moments. I believe there is a serious argument to be made for the notion that the Brandenburg Concertos, the Golden Gate Bridge, and the iPhone are candidates for the New Jerusalem, the centerpiece of God’s new heaven and new earth.

I base my argument on Revelation 21:24-26. There, it says, “the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into [the New Jerusalem]” (21:24). The Greek word translated here as “splendor” is *doxa*, which is usually rendered as “glory” (as in 21:23). That same word reappears two verses later, “The glory [*doxa*] and honor of the nations will be brought into [the city]” (21:26). To what does this refer? What glory? Which honor?

Some commentators argue that this refers to the worship offered by the nations and their kings to God.



Though I agree to a point, I think this interpretation misses the true sense of the language here. If we look back at Isaiah 60, which is closely related to Revelation 21, we read that “the wealth on the seas will be brought to [God’s people], to [them] the riches of the nations will come” (Isa 60:5). The gates of Jerusalem will never be shut “so that people may bring you the wealth of the nations—their kings led in triumphal procession” (Isa 60:11). The wealth of nations will be offered to God and used to beautify his sanctuary (Isa 60:13). John does not use precisely the same language as Isaiah to describe his vision, but when he speaks of the glory and honor of the nations being brought to the New Jerusalem, it’s likely that he describes something similar to what Isaiah envisioned centuries earlier.

Why would people bring their best things, the things that have brought them glory and honor, to the holy city? It lacks a temple, so these treasures would not be brought as offerings in the ordinary sense. Rather, it seems that bringing their very best to God is a way for the nations to worship God, not with their words or their rituals, but with their best stuff. It’s a way to subordinate the glory of human things to the ultimate glory of God. Yet, at the same time, the offering of the best human creations to God suggests that those things have some eternal value. They matter to God, who is glorified and

honored in receiving them, and will be present in the new heaven and earth.

I have asked myself what “glory” we might offer to God today. My mind quickly thought of what I believe to be some of the most amazing human creations: Bach’s Brandenburg Concertos, San Francisco’s Golden Gate Bridge, and, yes, the iPhone. Okay, I’ll agree that this is a strange list. You don’t have to agree with my choices, of course. I would invite you to think of human creations that inspire you. But then, instead of marveling at these creations, think of what it would be like if we were to offer them to God. We would be saying, “You created us with the potential to be creative, Lord. Here are some of the most glorious things we have made. We give them to you, acknowledging that they are the ultimate result of how you have made us. We offer them as gifts of worship. We confess that their glory doesn’t even approach your own. But, still, these are our gifts. We ask you to be honored and glorified by them.”





QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

- *How does John’s vision of human glory being offered to God change your view of the future? How does it change your view of human life and the value of human creative efforts in this age?*
- *If you were to offer to God in worship the very best that you have made in your life, what would you offer? I’m not asking only about tangible objects. Your best might be a well-functioning team, a classroom of students who are excited about learning, or your children who have become mature disciples. What might be the “glory” and “honor” that you would someday offer to God? How might you offer this in worship today?*



TAKEAWAYS: SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT, SOMETHING TO DO

- *What is one thing you will take away from today’s study? It could be a new thought or a tangible action step.*
- *A possibility: Once you have identified something that represents the very best you have made, offer it to God. I don’t mean you should take it to church and put it in the offering plate. Rather, tell the Lord that you are giving this to him in gratitude and honor. Thank him for the gifts and opportunities he has given you that have enabled you to make something valuable. Tell the Lord you will do anything he wishes with the treasure you are dedicating to him.*

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WRAPPING UP WITH PRAYER

As you conclude today's study, take a few moments to pray. I would encourage you to pray in two segments. First, pray specifically in response to your encounter with God's Word. Second, after you have done this, group members can share concerns and pray for each other.

Let the following prayer be a model for you:

Gracious God, even as a parent takes delight in a gift from a child, so you enjoy the gifts we offer you. One day, Lord, nations and kings will give you the best of human creations, so that you might be glorified. Help me to live with this mindset, to think of what I'm doing in life as an offering to you. May I give to you my very best, and may you delight in my offering.

To you be all the glory! Amen.



SOMETHING EXTRA

I have identified Bach's Brandenburg Concertos, the Golden Gate Bridge, and the iPhone as amazing human creations that could be brought into the New Jerusalem as glorious offerings to God. It's interesting to note that Johann Sebastian Bach was a committed Christian who wrote his music for God's glory. In fact, Bach penned the letters "S.D.G." at the end of his compositions (all of his church music and some of his secular music). "S.D.G" stands for *solī deo gloria*, which is Latin for "glory to God alone."

The genius behind the iPhone, Steve Jobs, did not intend for his work to glorify God. This does not mean, however, that God is not glorified in things human beings create that are amazing, since God is responsible for human creativity and engineering capacity. Sadly, Jobs never gave God credit as the source of his brilliance.

It's hard to know whether the designer of the Golden Gate Bridge, Joseph Strauss (not Josef Strauss the composer), saw his work as related to God or not. He [wrote two poems](#) around the time that the bridge was completed: "The Mighty Task is Done" and "The Golden Gate Bridge." Neither of these mentions God. A few years earlier, however, Strauss wrote a poem called



“[The Redwoods](#),” in which he explicitly gives God credit for these glorious trees. The first and last stanzas of his poem read:

Here, sown by the Creator’s hand.
In serried ranks, the Redwoods stand:
No other clime is honored so,
No other lands their glory know. . . .

To be like these, straight, true and fine,
to make our world like theirs, a shrine;
Sink down, Oh, traveler, on your knees,
God stands before you in these trees.



SESSION 3: WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE EXCEPTIONALLY FRUITFUL IN YOUR LIFE AND WORK?

BEGIN WITH THE BIBLE



After opening with prayer dedicating the time to the Lord, read Revelation 22:1-5 and John 15:1-8. If you have time, read all of Revelation 22.

QUESTIONS TO GET STARTED



- *As you read Revelation 22:1-5, what stands out to you?*
- *What do you wonder about in this passage?*

REFLECTIONS



My wife, Linda, and I live in Pasadena, California. One of the greatest blessings of our home is the collection of citrus trees in the backyard. Because they are not all the same type of tree, they produce fruit in different seasons. This means that Linda and I get to enjoy fresh lemons and oranges many times throughout the year. What a wonderful gift!

In Revelation 22 there is a tree that produces plentiful fruit, not just once a year or even several times a year, but every single month of the year. It's a little hard to figure out whether John envisions one very large and unusual tree that somehow grows on both sides of the river of life, or whether he sees a collection of trees. But we don't have to get hung up in the details. The point is that the tree (or grove of trees) provides an abundant harvest throughout the year. Talk about exceptional fruitfulness!

It's equally striking that this is not just any old amazing fruit tree. John identifies it as the "tree of life," picking

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up the language of Genesis, where God planted the “tree of life” in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8-9). When Adam and Eve sinned, God banished them from the Garden lest they eat from the “tree of life” and live forever in their sinful, shattered state (Genesis 3:22-23). In the age to come, however, God will have fully and finally dealt with the problem of sin. Thus, we will be able to enjoy the fruit of the tree of life without limitation. This is implicit in Revelation 22, but explicit in Revelation 2, where the risen Christ promises that, to “the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (2:7).

We have much to look forward to according to Revelation 22. There will be a time when life will flow from God like a crystal river. This river will water the tree of life, enabling it to be consistently fruitful. This suggests not only that we will be nourished by God’s living water and life-giving fruit, but also that we will live fruitfully beyond anything we can imagine today. We will be rather like the amazing tree of life in Revelation 22.

Yet, the promise of future fruitfulness does not mean that we are sentenced to live barren lives in this age. We don’t have to wait around to bear good fruit. In John 15,

Jesus invites us to be deeply and inseparably connected to him, even as branches are joined to the vine. In verse 5 he says, “If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.” When we abide in Christ, drawing our vitality from him, we will bear much fruit in all areas of life, including our work (John 15:1-8). Moreover, our lives will be filled with meaning and value, even though we continue to live imperfect lives in an imperfect world. John’s vision in Revelation 22 fills us with hope, even as it reminds us of our potential for exceptional fruitfulness today if we live deeply engaged with Christ.





QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

- *How might John's vision of the exceptionally fruitful tree make a difference for you?*
- *In what areas or activities of life are you fruitful today?*
- *How does your relationship with Christ help you bear fruit? How do you stay deeply connected to Christ?*
- *If you could become more fruitful in your life, what might this look like? In what aspects of your life are you longing to be more fruitful? Work? Family? Other relationships? Church? Community service? Doing justice? Sharing the good news?*



TAKEAWAYS: SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT, SOMETHING TO DO

- *What is one thing you will take away from today's study? It could be a new thought or a tangible action step.*
- *A possibility: If you don't already do so on a regularly basis, commit this week to spending a short time in prayer each day in your workplace. It doesn't have to be obvious or obnoxious. Rather, in a quiet way, stop work long enough to offer yourself and your work to Christ, and in this way to abide in him in your workplace.*





WRAPPING UP WITH PRAYER

Let the following prayer be a model for you:

Gracious God, our hearts yearn for the day when the tree of life will be abundantly fruitful and we will be able to enjoy this fruit. How wonderful it will be to experience the fullness of life, life as you meant it to be!

As we look forward to this time, we are grateful for the invitation to live fruitfully now. Thank you for connecting us to Christ by your grace, so that we might bear much fruit. Help us, Lord, to live in Christ so that we might be fruitful at home and at work, in our service and our relationships, in church and throughout the world. Let your fruit grow exceptionally through us, Lord.

To you be all the glory! Amen.



SOMETHING EXTRA

If you're looking for wisdom about how to abide in Christ in the context of your daily work, Brother Lawrence may offer just what you need. In his classic work, [*Practice of the Presence of God*](#), Brother Lawrence models and teaches what he calls "the presence of God." He did this while working in the kitchen of his monastery, work "to which he naturally has a great aversion," according to his biographer. Nevertheless, "[h]e simply has accustomed himself to do everything there for the love of God. And on all occasions he performs his work with prayer, asking for God's grace to do his work well. As a result, during the fifteen years that he has been employed there, Brother Lawrence has found everything to be easy."

Drawing from the wisdom of Brother Lawrence, I have written a small group study guide and a devotional guide that share the name *Practicing the Presence of God at Work*. You can find and download those guides at store.depre.org.

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SESSION 4: GARDENING WITHOUT THE WEEDS

BEGIN WITH THE BIBLE



After opening with prayer dedicating the time to the Lord, read Revelation 22:1-5 and Genesis 3:17-19. If you have time, read all of Revelation 2.

QUESTIONS TO GET STARTED



- *As we return to Revelation 22:1-5, does anything in this text stand out to you in a fresh way?*
- *How does Genesis 3:17-19 help us understand our work?*
- *Do you have new questions or discoveries?*

REFLECTIONS



If you've ever done any gardening, you know a couple of things for sure. First, no matter how much you try to prevent it, weeds will grow in your garden. Second, getting rid of the weeds is not fun. Many actions associated with gardening, such as preparing the soil or harvesting the fruit, can be fairly pleasant, even though they require significant effort. But weeding is not one of these, at least not in my experience. I've never known anyone who said with joyful expectation: "Oh, I'm so excited I get to weed my garden today."

As you may recall from the first chapters of Genesis, God did not intend for us to have to fight weeds as we tend our gardens. But, because Adam and Eve sinned, God cursed the ground so that it would produce weeds and force us to do our work only "through painful toil" (Gen 3:17). "Thorns and thistles," particularly nasty weeds, started to grow as a result of sin (Gen 3:18). We experience this reality not only when we are working the soil as gardeners or farmers, but in every kind of work. No matter your occupation, you know how it feels when



things don't go as they should, when your work is made more difficult by dysfunction, whether in tools, systems, or colleagues—not to mention yourself.

The good news of Revelation 22 is that it will not always be this way. Yes, in this present age our work will be more toilsome because of “thorns and thistles.” But, in the age to come, “[n]o longer will there be any curse” (22:3). The curse of Genesis 3 will be revoked because of God's completed work in Christ. Thus, we will be free to work as God intended us to work. We will know the joy of investing our energy in worthy activities without facing the distress of accursed hindrances. Work will still demand effort, but effort that leads to joyful fulfillment rather than painful frustration.

I realize that the notion of working in the age to come might seem peculiar to you, given the historic tendency of Christians to talk about heaven as little more than a big family reunion and an endless church service. But if we take seriously the fact that God created us for work (see Genesis 1-2), that in our work we imitate God the worker and express our creation in God's own image, and that the New Jerusalem will be filled with the “glory and honor” of the nations, it shouldn't surprise us that we will have the chance to work in the age to come.

In the meanwhile, our work in this age is less than ideal. As Tim Keller and Katherine Leary Alsdorf explain in *Every Good Endeavor*, because of sin, work becomes fruitless, pointless, selfish, and idolatrous. At the same time, because of Christ's unique work on the cross, we can begin to experience the renewal of all things, including our work. The future, as envisioned in Revelation 22, empowers us with hope so that we might work for God's glory even now, looking forward to the day when the curse will be no more.



QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

- *When you think of life in the age to come, does work figure into your thinking? Why or why not?*
- *Does the notion that we will work in the new earth encourage you or discourage you? Why?*
- *What might your work be like without the curse that is a result of sin?*

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TAKEAWAYS: SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT, SOMETHING TO DO

- *What is one thing you will take away from today's study, either a new thought or a practical action?*
- *A possibility: If you're in a management position, think about the "thorns and thistles" encountered by those you supervise. Though some of these are inescapable in a fallen world, others might be part of the fallen world that you, with God's help, can restore. How might you remove some of the "thorns and thistles" that plague your staff?*



WRAPPING UP WITH PRAYER

Let the following prayer be a model for you:

Gracious God, thank you for the hope you give us that, one day, the curse will be no more. We will be free to live as you intended us to live from the beginning. In particular, our work will be enjoyable and fruitful in ways we can only begin to imagine.

As we live in light of the hope of the future, may our work glorify you in spite of the curse that taints it. May the vision of Revelation 22 encourage and sustain us, so that we might do our work, even today, with commitment and joy. Amen.





SOMETHING EXTRA

If you have not read [*Every Good Endeavor*](#) by Timothy Keller, with Katherine Leary Alsdorf, I would highly recommend it to you. Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York, is a pastoral theologian with a deep understanding of Scripture and how it relates to our culture today. Alsdorf, after working in the marketplace for many years, founded Redeemer's Center for Faith & Work. Together, Keller and Alsdorf have written one of the finest books on the integration of faith and work.

Here's an excerpt to whet your appetite: "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" (p. 29).

I would also recommend the video resources produced by the Center for Faith & Work that are available on YouTube. See [the CFW channel](#).



SESSION 5: GIVE YOURSELF COMPLETELY TO GOD

BEGIN WITH THE BIBLE



After opening with prayer dedicating the time to the Lord, read Revelation 22:8-9 and Ephesians 1:11-14. If you have time, read all of Revelation 22.

QUESTIONS TO GET STARTED



- *As you read this passage of Scripture, what questions arise for you?*
- *What do you see in this passage that might be relevant to your work?*

REFLECTIONS



In the final chapter of Revelation, we observe a scene that reminds us to give ourselves completely to God. It comes after the vision given to John, the writer of Revelation, had ended. He was so moved by what he had seen that John “fell down to worship at the feet of the angel” who had shown the vision to him (22:8). But the angel rebuked John, saying, “Don’t do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your fellow prophets and with all who keep the words of this scroll. Worship God!” (22:9).

The Greek verb translated here as “worship” has a literal sense of kneeling or bowing before someone or something as a gesture of honor and submission. This was the posture used in the ancient world when subjects approached kings or queens. The subjects got down on their knees, bowing their heads to the ground, as a way of acknowledging the supreme authority of the ruler before them. Their action said, in effect, “You are the sovereign over me and my life. I offer myself to you in respect and obedience.”



The biblical language for worship, in both the Old and New Testaments, draws upon this sense of submission and self-offering. In biblical worship we offer ourselves completely to God, acknowledging God's sovereignty over us. Worship is more than telling God how wonderful he is. It is more than singing songs of praise. These actions are rightly central to our worship traditions. But, they should be expressions of the deeper reality of worship, in which we offer not just our words to God, but our very lives, all that we are. As it says in Ephesians 1:11-14, we live—and our work is central to our living—for the praise of God's glory.

When I was younger, I remember hearing a Bible teacher say that everything we experience during the week—at work, in school, and so forth—is meant to prepare us for worship on Sunday. The very most important thing we do is worship God in our Sunday gatherings. Everything else is preparation for this main event. There is a measure of truth in this claim. But I would be more inclined now to say that what happens in corporate worship on Sunday prepares us for living worshipfully throughout the week. When, for example, you sing songs of devotion to God, these songs get your heart in shape to work for God's glory each day.

In Session 6 I'd like to reflect with you on some implications of this truth for our work. For now, let me invite you to take time to examine your own life and worship. Perhaps the following questions will help.



QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

- *How do you understand worship? When you think of worshiping God, what images, ideas, or feelings come to mind?*
- *When you engage in acts of worship, whether in church or in your personal devotions, do you sense that you are giving yourself fully to God?*
- *What helps you to offer your whole life to God?*





TAKEAWAYS: SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT, SOMETHING TO DO

- *What is one thing you will take away from today's study?*
- *A possibility: The next time you hear a sermon, don't focus on whether or not you "liked" the sermon. Rather, focus on how that sermon and the whole worship service of which it was a part will help you to worship God through your work during the following week.*



WRAPPING UP WITH PRAYER

Let the following prayer help you talk to God about the connection between your work and your worship:

Gracious God, thank you for the clear words of the angel to John, words we need to hear as well: "Worship God!" Help us to worship you, not only by offering words that honor you, but also by giving ourselves to you fully, without holding anything back.

Even today, as I go about my work, may I offer all that I am to you. May you be glorified in my life, in all I do and say, in all I think and feel. May my work be true worship, dear Lord. Amen.



SOMETHING EXTRA

The folk at RightNow Ministries have produced many excellent videos on the theme of work as worship. Many of these are available for purchase from the [RightNow store](#), but several are offered for free on YouTube and other similar platforms. Check out "[Work as Worship](#)" and "[Created to Create](#)."

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SESSION 6: GIVE YOURSELF COMPLETELY TO GOD, NOT YOUR WORK

BEGIN WITH THE BIBLE



After opening with prayer dedicating the time to the Lord, read Revelation 22:8-9 and Psalm 100:1-5. If you have time, read all of Revelation 22.

QUESTIONS TO GET STARTED



- *As you read Revelation 22:8-9 again, does anything new stand out to you?*
- *How do you respond to the title of this session?*

REFLECTIONS



In Session 5, we focused on the command of the angel to John, “Worship God!” (22:9). I pointed out that the biblical verb translated here as “worship” means, literally, to bow down in submission, as before a human sovereign. From a biblical point of view, when we worship God truly, we offer ourselves to God completely. At the core, worship is submitting our whole lives to God.

The episode in Revelation 22:8-9 reminds us of the danger of worshipping something or someone other than God. John was so impressed by the angel who had revealed a glorious vision to him that John bowed down in worship before the angel. Immediately, the angel rebuked John because the angel was “a fellow servant” with him (22:9). God alone is worthy of our worship. Thus, the angel said, “Worship God!” (22:9).

You and I may not be tempted to worship an angel if we saw one, but we are easily tempted to worship other beings or other things. Remember, worship is not mainly a matter of saying special things to someone. It isn’t

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primarily a set of observances or rituals. Rather, worship means offering ourselves fully to someone or something. If we keep this sense of worship in mind, we might realize that we can easily worship people or things other than God.

It can be tempting, for example, to offer ourselves completely to our work. This is more than valuing our work or working very hard. Rather, it is making work the #1 priority in our lives. It is letting the agenda of work govern the rest of our lives. It is putting work ahead of family, friendship, and faith. We will probably not literally bow down before our work, but our priorities, calendars, values, relationships, and dreams can reveal that we have indeed given ourselves mainly if not completely to our work.

I am not saying that we should not invest ourselves in our work or that it is wrong to do our best at work. In fact, our work can be a profound expression of worship. But for this to happen, we need to follow the admonition of the angel and “worship God,” not our work. We need to give ourselves fully to God and do our work as an expression of this fundamental devotion. In fact, when we worship God with all that we are, then we are prepared to give ourselves wisely and well to our work, as well as to other worthy endeavors.



QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

- *Can you think of times in your life when you have given yourself mainly (or completely) to your work? If so, what led you to this? If not, what has kept you from this?*
- *How might your work life be different if you were giving yourself completely to God and working as an expression of this commitment?*
- *What helps you give yourself to God most of all?*

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TAKEAWAYS: SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT, SOMETHING TO DO

- *What is one thing you will take away from today's study, either something to think about or something to do?*
- *A possibility: For at least a week, offer to the Lord a short prayer of dedication when you get to your place of work. Give yourself completely to him and ask that your work will glorify him. Then get to work . . . for God.*



WRAPPING UP WITH PRAYER

Let the following prayer be a model for you:

Gracious God, I do sense in my own heart a tendency to be like John when it comes to my worship. Not that I worship angels or literally bow to other things or beings, but it is so easy for me to put things other than you first in my life. This is especially true for me when my work is engaging, challenging, and demanding. It is easy for me to structure my life around work as my #1 priority.

So, forgive me, Lord, when I displace you. Help me, I pray, to give myself completely to you, even and especially when my work is engaging, challenging, and demanding. May my devotion to you give shape to my life and guide me each day in all I do, including my work.

May my life give all glory, honor, and praise to you. Amen.

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SOMETHING EXTRA

I thought I'd share a story with you about a time when I "worshipped" my work. I'm not proud of this, mind you, but it may encourage you to examine your own practices more carefully.

For all of my life, I have loved decorating a Christmas tree. I loved it when I was a boy and I still love it today. But perhaps my greatest enjoyment of Christmas tree decorating came when my kids were young. In early December, I'd get a tree and put on the lights. Then, I'd play some Christmas music while my family and I decorated our tree. We often paused to remember where or whom certain decorations came from. We'd celebrate happy memories as well as get our hearts primed for Advent and Christmas.

One year, as we began decorating the tree, I remembered that I had an email needing a quick response. Rather than putting off this task until later, I ran up to my study at home, opened my computer, and responded to the email. That took all of three minutes. But, while my computer was open, another email showed up, one that caused me considerable distress. I took a few more minutes to answer that email so I could decorate the tree in peace. But, as you might guess, yet another email showed up, with someone else upset

about what had precipitated the second email. I just had to respond to that one too. And the next. And the next.

An hour later, my son, Nathan, trudged up the stairs and found me. "Dad," he said in a sad voice, "What happened to you? Where did you go? You missed decorating the tree! It's all done and you missed it."

I apologized to Nathan, and he went downstairs. Alone, I began to weep, devastated about what I had done. I had been so wrapped up in my work that I missed a wonderful family time, one of my favorite times of the year. I couldn't believe that I had chosen to work rather than be with my family. I told myself I would never, ever do that again.

And, to my knowledge, I haven't. But now my children aren't home when it's time to decorate the Christmas tree, since they both no longer live locally. Linda and I enjoy decorating, but it's just not the same. Every year I remember how I had once chosen to miss the family tradition. And, every year, I promise myself and the Lord that I will not put work first in my life.

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SESSION 7: GIVE YOURSELF *COMPLETELY* TO GOD THROUGH YOUR WORK

BEGIN WITH THE BIBLE



After opening with prayer dedicating the time to the Lord, read Revelation 22:8-9 once again. Then read Psalm 100:1-5. If you have time, read all of Revelation 22.

QUESTIONS TO GET STARTED

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- *As you read Revelation 22:8-9 again, does anything new stand out to you?*
 - *How about in Psalm 100?*
 - *How do you respond to the title of this session?*

REFLECTIONS



The title of the previous session in this study guide was “Give Yourself *Completely* to God, *Not* Your Work.” God alone is worthy of our worship. To God alone should we submit all that we are. Only God deserves our full allegiance and dedication.

As I said in the previous session, it is certainly tempting for some of us to give ourselves completely to our work, to make work the #1 priority for our lives, thus displacing God. But, I don’t want to imply that our work is necessarily opposed to our worship. In fact, if we pay attention to all that Scripture says about work and worship, we’ll discover that one of the major ways we can worship God is *through* our work.

In Session 5, I noted that the biblical language for worship is based on the image of bowing down before a human sovereign. When we worship God, we offer ourselves fully and humbly to God, honoring him in our submission. But there is another, related word group for worship in Scripture. We see this in Psalm 100:2,



for example: “Worship the LORD with gladness.” The verb translated here as “worship” is ‘*abad* (usually transliterated as ‘*avad*). Psalm 100 calls us to “worship” or “serve” the Lord through joyful shouting and singing. But ‘*avad* has a wide range of meaning in the Old Testament. If we look back to Genesis 2:15, for example, we see that God put the man in the Garden of Eden “to work it and take care of it.” The verb translated here as “work” is ‘*avad*.

Thus, the biblical language of worship points to the fact that through our work we can worship God. The biblical story makes the same point, again and again. Since God created us so that we might work (‘*avad*), we can honor God’s intention and worship (‘*avad*) God through our work. Work doesn’t have to be an idol competing for God’s sovereignty over our lives. Rather, it can be an offering of worship to God, one that responds to and honors his sovereignty.

The fact that our work can be either an essential element of our worship or an expression of idolatry that displaces God or, as may often be the case, a mix of both, makes us wonder how we can know whether our work is worship or not. In fact, one of the readers of *Life for Leaders* sent me an email some time ago asking this very question. In the next session of this study guide, I’ll

offer some of my thoughts in response. For now, I’d like to encourage you to reflect on your own life, work, and worship in light of what we’re seeing in Scripture today.



QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

- *If God intends our work to be an essential element of our worship, how can we actually work in a way that worships God?*
- *Are there times when you are able to offer your work to God as worship? What makes this possible for you?*
- *Are there aspects of your work that seem far removed from worship? How might these become a genuine act of worship?*
- *In your opinion, when does work slip from worship of God to idolatry? When are we worshipping our work rather than God?*





TAKEAWAYS: SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT, SOMETHING TO DO

- *What is one thing you will take away from today's study?*
- *A possibility: Do something each day that says to the Lord, "My work is for you" and that says to you, "My work is for the Lord."*



WRAPPING UP WITH PRAYER

Let the following prayer be a model for you:

Gracious God, you have made us and saved us to live for the praise of your glory. We are meant to worship you with all that we are, including our work. Thank you for the opportunity both to share in your work in the world and to worship you through our work.

Lord, we recognize, however, our tendency to make work something more than a way to worship you. We can give ourselves so completely to work that we make it an idol. Work becomes our #1 priority, our primary purpose in life.

Forgive us when we do this, gracious God. And teach us how to work for you and your purposes in all we do. Help us to worship you through our work.

To you be all the glory! Amen.

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SOMETHING EXTRA

There is an article on the website of The Institute for Faith, Work, and Economics that explores the nuances of *avodah*, the Hebrew noun meaning “work, service, worship,” from the same root as the verb *avad*. Here is an excerpt from “[*‘Avodah’: What It Means to Live a Seamless Life of Work, Worship, and Service*](#),” by Austin Burkhardt:

Avodah is a picture of an integrated faith. A life where work and worship come from the same root. The same foundation. . . .

So often we think of worship as something we do on Sunday and work as something we do on Monday. This dichotomy is neither what God designed nor what he desires for our lives.

Avodah, on the other hand, suggests that our work can be a form of worship where we honor the Lord God, and serve our neighbors.



SESSION 8: IS WORK ALWAYS WORSHIP?

BEGIN WITH THE BIBLE



After opening with prayer dedicating the time to the Lord, read Revelation 22:8-9. Also read Colossians 3:17, 23-24 and Ephesians 1:1-14.

QUESTIONS TO GET STARTED



- *As you read the biblical texts for this session, what stands out for you?*

REFLECTIONS



Like many Christians, I grew up believing that work mattered. Through work I could earn money to support my family and myself. With what I earned at work I could also contribute to God's work in the world, which happened through churches and mission organizations. The workplace also had value because it provided a primary context for me to share my faith with others.

So, work mattered, but mainly because it enabled good things to happen in addition to and apart from the work itself.

In the last twenty-five years, many Christ-followers have come to understand that work matters not only because of the good that it supports, but also because work itself can have intrinsic goodness and godliness. Through our work, we can serve people. Through our work, we can contribute to the flourishing of our world. Through our work, we can find personal meaning and fulfillment. And through our work, we can worship God. Work, when seen in light of Scripture, is at the center of God's intentions for us (see, for example, Genesis 1:28; 2:15). Through working, we can honor God and participate in his work in the world, which includes but goes far beyond what happens through churches and other Christian organizations. In a nutshell, as we often hear these days, "*work is worship.*"

That simple statement, "work is worship," has transformed the work experience of tens of thousands of Christians. In time, I believe it will change the lives

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of millions of believers throughout the world. “Work is worship” is a powerful motto, something we can affirm and remember that will renew our lives, our workplaces, and even our world.

But “work is worship” is not always true. Work certainly can be worship. It can certainly glorify God and be essential to God’s work in the world. But work can also be anything *but* worship. It can dishonor God and hurt God’s work in the world. To cite an extreme case, there are some people whose work today involves bombing gathering places filled with innocent people. Surely this kind of work is not worship. So, the simple statement “work is worship” is a powerful slogan, but not a theologically accurate estimation of all work.

The problem with citing such an extreme example is that it has the potential to let the rest of us off the hook. As long as I’m not murdering innocent people, I might reason, then my work must be worship. But is this really the case? And, in the end, are we really satisfied with simply saying that “work is worship” even when we may have nagging doubts? I have spent time with many business leaders who really want their work to be worship but aren’t quite sure whether it is, or in what way it is. Moreover, they want to honor God in every part of life, yet they wonder if working seventy

hours a week to help a major corporation make even more money is really worship. These leaders fear that they might use “work is worship” as a way to bless their activities that have little to do with serving God.

In recent sessions of this study guide, and in the next two, we will continue to chew on these issues. But, I want to end today’s session with something I find extremely encouraging. I hope it encourages you, too. In Revelation 22:9, the angel said, “Worship God!” This imperative speaks as incisively to us today as it did to John a couple of millennia ago. We are to worship God. We are to live for the praise of God’s glory (Ephesians 1:11-14). As I speak with marketplace leaders and other workers, I consistently find a yearning for this kind of life. *We want to worship God in all we do, including our work.* We want to live the truth of Colossians 3:17: “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Millions of Christians today are no longer satisfied with dividing our lives into disconnected sacred and secular realms. We want to live integrated lives in which all the pieces fit together. And we want our whole lives to honor God, to be a genuine act of worship. By acknowledging that work *can be* worship, we are spurred on to discover how our work can truly honor God and contribute to his work on earth.





QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

- *To what extent is your life a reflection of Colossians 3:17?*
- *Are there elements of your work that you can easily see as worship? Are there aspects of your work that you cannot easily identify as worship?*
- *What makes something one does in the workplace worship?*
- *How might you worship God through your work today?*



TAKEAWAYS: SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT, SOMETHING TO DO

- *What is one thing you will take away from today's study?*
- *A possibility: Take some time to pray very specifically that God will help you see how your work is worship. Ask also for clarity about elements of your work that are not honoring to God.*





WRAPPING UP WITH PRAYER

Let the following prayer be a model for you:

Gracious God, you created us for work. Through our work we can worship you. We would like to do this not just every now and then, but consistently. How good it would be to know that we are worshipping you through our work each day!

Yet, we recognize that our work is not necessarily worship. Work can even be contrary to your purposes and glory. And it can draw our hearts away from you. So, help us, we pray. Teach us, Lord, more about how our work can be worship. By your Spirit, help us to offer our work to you this day.

*All praise, honor, and glory be to you, O God.
Amen.*



SOMETHING EXTRA

One way we can begin to experience our work as worship is by making work a consistent theme of our weekly worship services. The Theology of Work Project has collected a variety of resources around the topic: “[Worship Resources: Bring Work into the Sunday Service.](#)” The [Theology of Work website](#) is filled with ample and wise biblical resources.



SESSION 9: AM I WORSHIPING GOD THROUGH MY WORK? OR AM I WORSHIPING MY WORK INSTEAD OF GOD?

BEGIN WITH THE BIBLE



After opening with prayer dedicating the time to the Lord, read Revelation 22:8-9. Also read Exodus 34:17; Colossians 3:17, 23-24; Ephesians 1:11-14; 2:10.

QUESTIONS TO GET STARTED



- *As you read the title of this session—“Am I Worshiping God Through My Work? Or Am I Worshiping My Work Instead of God?”—what thoughts come to mind? How might you answer these questions?*

REFLECTIONS



In the last session, we began to reflect on how our work can be worship. Two verses from Revelation 22, as well as several verses from Colossians and Ephesians, led us to this reflection. In Revelation 22:8, John fell down to worship the angel who had revealed the glorious vision of the future to him. But the angel rebuked John, rejecting his worship and telling him to “[w]orship God!” (22:9). Analogously, we can sometimes be so devoted to our work that we could be said to worship work. Yet, Scripture teaches us that work can be a way for us to worship God. Work is worship. Yes, sometimes. Work is idolatry. Yes, sometimes. Work is a mix of the two. Yes, sometimes.

So how can we know the difference?

Simply put, idolatry is worshiping something other than God. It’s worshiping the creation rather than the Creator. If worship, at its core, is offering your whole self to something or someone, bowing down to that which you honor as sovereign over your life, then idolatry is

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offering your whole self to something or someone other than God.

I would suggest that we can see where our work falls on the worship-idolatry scale by examining our actions and our hearts.

What do the actions of our lives tell us about what or whom we worship? Do they bear witness to the fact that God is first in our lives? Or do they rather show us that work comes first? In part, this has to do with how we spend our time. Of course most of us will spend the majority of our waking hours working. But if work always gets the best part of my life and God always gets the dregs, then it's pretty clear what I worship. (There are times, I must admit, when I'm tempted to skip my morning devotions in order to get straight to work. Perhaps you can relate.)

This leads us to the question of our hearts. When we honestly peer inside of ourselves, what do we see? Are we truly seeking to serve the Lord in our work? Are we seeking to contribute to his work in the world, to the common good of all? Do we want our actions at work to reflect God's sovereignty and values? Could you honestly pray at the beginning of your day, "Lord, I offer to you as worship all I will do at work today"? And

could you pray with integrity at the end of your workday, "Lord, I've worked for you today"?

Now, I'm not suggesting that we should always be thinking mainly about God as we work. Much of what we do requires and deserves our full attention. Yet, even when we are fully invested in the work that is before us, we can still do this work as an act of worship. It's a matter of what motivates and empowers us. It's a matter of our understanding of the ultimate purpose of our work. Are we working hard mainly for personal gain? Or to please the boss? Or to show up a colleague? Or simply to get the job done? Or to honor God and contribute to God's work in the world? Whom are we serving when we do our work?

These questions are not answered easily, but they point us in the right direction. So, let me encourage you to reflect on the questions we have been asking as they are repeated below.

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QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

- *What do the actions of our lives tell us about what or whom we worship? Do they bear witness to the fact that God is first in our lives? Or do they rather show us that work comes first?*
- *When we honestly peer inside of ourselves, what do we see? Are we truly seeking to serve the Lord in our work? Are we seeking to contribute to his work in the world, to the common good of all? Do we want our actions at work to reflect God's sovereignty and values?*
- *Are we working hard mainly for personal gain? Or to please the boss? Or to show up a colleague? Or simply to get the job done? Or to honor God and contribute to God's work in the world?*



TAKEAWAYS: SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT, SOMETHING TO DO

- *What is one thing you will take away from today's study?*
- *A possibility: In preparation for an upcoming meeting, perhaps a board meeting or a one-on-one meeting with a colleague, think about how you would act and speak if you were intentionally seeking God's glory in that meeting.*

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WRAPPING UP WITH PRAYER

Let the following prayer be a model for you:

Gracious God, we want to worship you in all that we do, including our work. So teach us, Lord, to discern wisely and well what motivates our work. Help us to identify ways in which our work is idolatrous. By your Spirit, may we learn to give all that we are to you as we do our daily work. May you be glorified in what we do, how we do it, and why we do it.

To you be all the glory! Amen.



SOMETHING EXTRA

In Session 4, I recommended a marvelous book on faith and work, [*Every Good Endeavor*](#) by Timothy Keller, with Katherine Leary Alsdorf. This book devotes a whole chapter to the topic “Work Reveals Our Idols.” I’m going to quote a couple of excerpts from this chapter:

Idols are not only pervasive, they are powerful. Why do the Ten Commandments begin with a prohibition of idolatry? It is, Luther argued, because we never break the other commandments without breaking the first. For example, suppose you know that complete transparency in a business negotiation will yield you considerably less leverage than will a small measure of deceit. In that situation, if you lie or obscure inconvenient facts, it is because you have counted success as more important than obedience to God or the good of your “neighbor” with whom you are negotiating. So beneath the sin of lying is the deeper, conditioning sin of idolatry. It could be argued that everything we do wrong—every cruel action, dishonest word, broken promise, self-centered attitude—stems from a conviction deep in our souls that there is something more crucial to our happiness and meaning than the love of God (p. 134).

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Keller claims that “[t]he Christian gospel decidedly furnishes us with the resources for more inspired, realistic, satisfying, and faithful work today” (p. 151). He gives four reasons how.

First, the gospel provides an alternate story line for our work; this is vital because all work is propelled by a worldview or a narrative account of what human life is all about and what will help us thrive.

Second, the Christian faith gives us a new and rich conception of work as partnering with God in his love and care for the world. This biblical conception helps us appreciate all work, from the most simple to the most complex, by both believers and nonbelievers. So Christians who grasp a biblical theology of work learn not only to value and participate in the work of all people but to also see ways to work distinctively as Christians.

Third, the gospel gives us a particularly sensitive new moral compass, through a host of sound ethical guidelines to help us make decisions, as well as wise counsel about human hearts.

Finally, the gospel radically changes our motives for work and fills us with a new and durable inner power that will be with us through thick and thin.



SESSION 10: HOW CAN I KNOW IF MY WORK IS WORSHIP OR IDOLATRY OR BOTH? A PRACTICAL SUGGESTION

BEGIN WITH THE BIBLE



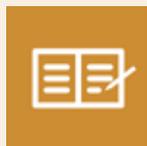
After opening with prayer dedicating the time to the Lord, once again read Revelation 22:8-9. Also read Exodus 34:17; Colossians 3:17, 23-24; and Ephesians 1:11-14; 2:10.

QUESTIONS TO GET STARTED



- *How would you respond to the question of the title of this session: How can I know if my work is worship or idolatry or both?*

REFLECTIONS



In Session 9 we began to consider the question: How can I know if my work is worship or idolatry or both? This question assumes what we have seen in several recent devotions, namely, that our work can be worship when it is an expression of God's sovereignty over our lives. Our work is worship when we offer it to God for his purposes and glory. Yet, if our work takes first place in our lives, if work is the constant that determines all the other variables in our lives, if work consistently takes time away from God, family, and even our own well-being, then our work has become an idol.

In the last session, I suggested that we can discover where our work falls on the worship-idolatry scale by examining our actions and our hearts. What we do and why we do it reveal our core commitments and values. They reveal our deep intentions and yearnings. By honestly examining our lives and peering into our hearts, with the help of God's Spirit, we can begin to see whether our work is worship or idolatry or a combination of the two. (In my personal and pastoral

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experience, the combination of worship and idolatry is most common.)

In this session, I want to add a practical suggestion into the mix. It's really quite simple. *If you want to discover where your work falls on the worship-idolatry scale, invite others to share in this discernment process with you.* Find at least one brother or sister in Christ—a person of wisdom and maturity, someone who isn't afraid to tell you the truth, someone you can trust enough to be open about what's real in your life—and invite that person (or those people) to help you understand how your work relates to God.

The form of community for this discernment process could vary. You might do this in the small group with whom you've been sharing in this study. You might decide to share in this process with one trusted, wise brother or sister in Christ. You might get into a structured relationship with a pastoral counselor or spiritual director.

Right now, in my life, I have invited several others to help me discover what's true about my own work in relationship to God. These others include my wife, a few close friends, my pastor, and a spiritual director. As I talk with these brothers and sisters about my work, I

am learning things I would not have been able to figure out on my own. One result of this process is that I am more intentional than I have ever been about offering my work to God on a daily basis. I am learning how to let my work be worship, not only through my individual spiritual disciplines, but also through the discipline of Christian community.

There is much more that could be said about work and worship, of course. But, for now, let me encourage you, once again, to let your work be worship. And, if it seems right, you may want to invite at least one other person to walk with you on this path as you seek to offer all that you are and all that you do to the Lord.





QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

- *Have you ever been in relationship with other believers in which conversations about work helped you to offer your work to God as worship?*
- *Do you sense a need for engaging in this conversation with others? Who might those others be for you?*
- *What might help you today to offer your work to the Lord as worship?*



TAKEAWAYS: SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT, SOMETHING TO DO

- *What is one thing you will take away from today's study?*
- *A possibility: In the next week, find at least one trusted brother or sister in Christ and have an honest conversation about your work and worship.*





WRAPPING UP WITH PRAYER

Let the following prayer be a model for you:

Gracious God, once again we thank you for the privilege of knowing and worshipping you. We thank you also for the opportunity to worship you through our work.

Help us, Lord, to grow in our ability to offer our work to you as worship. Help us to turn from any temptation to make work the top priority of our lives. Give us wisdom, we pray, as we examine our actions and hearts. Bring into our lives others who can share with us in this discernment process.

All praise, glory, and honor be to you, O God, in every part of life, including our work. Amen.



SOMETHING EXTRA

As you probably know, this Bible study guide is part of the *Life for Leaders* series of study and devotional guides. [Life for Leaders](#) is a program of the [Max De Pree Center for Leadership](#) at [Fuller Seminary](#).

The *Life for Leaders* daily devotional is a free, daily, digital devotional based on Scripture and focused on the integration of faith and work. The *Life for Leaders* Bible study and devotional guides are edited versions of the daily devotions. You can sign up for the daily devotions from the [De Pree Center main page](#).

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Some Helpful Resources for Faith and Work Integration

If you are looking for additional resources to help you think wisely and act biblical when it comes to faith and work integration, I would suggest the following:

Theology of Work Project - theologyofwork.org

TOW describes itself this way: “The Theology of Work Project answers the question “What does the Bible say about work?” by producing Bible commentary, topical articles, and audio/video resources that examine faith and work from a Christian perspective. The Bible and work are meticulously analyzed in our commentary, and lessons are driven home through case studies and videos.” The resources on the Theology of Work Project website are vast.

Made to Flourish – madetoflourish.org

A network of pastors who are leading their churches “to connect Sunday faith to Monday work.” Lots of resources on this site for pastors, churches, and marketplace leaders.

Oikonomia Network – oikonomianetwork.org

Though intended primarily for seminary professors, ON has resources of value for marketplace leaders as well. See, in particular, their Economic Wisdom Project (oikonomianetwork.org/resources/economic-wisdom-project/).

Denver Institute for Faith & Work – denverinstitute.org

Lots of great resources here, plus opportunities to participate in excellent events.

The Washington Institute – washingtoninst.org

The Washington Institute helps people with faith and work integration by seeing life in terms of vocation, the call of God to each of us. Thoughtful blog posts and dozens of resources.

Center for Faith and Work – faithandwork.com

Sponsored by Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York, the Center sponsors outstanding events and publishes valuable resources.





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