"The last few years have witnessed a flurry of books that treat a Christian view of work. This is the best of them. Well written, historically comprehensive, theologically informed, exegetically sensitive—this is now the 'must-read' volume on the subject."

—**D. A. Carson**, Emeritus Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

"For everyone everywhere, our work is an expression of how we answer the most complex questions of life, of who we are and why we are. A historian, a theologian, an ethicist, a pastor, and (perhaps most profoundly) a grandfather, Dan Doriani takes up this complexity with seasoned wisdom born of years of paying attention to the life he has lived and the labor he has done. This volume is a unique contribution to the growing literature on the meaning of work for human beings. At one and the same time it is rooted in remarkably rich biblical and theological reflection and also pastorally responsive to the people Dan has known whose vocational questions have informed his writing. I know of no other book like *Work*. May it have a wide reading among those who wrestle with why we work, and why our work matters to God and the world."

—**Steven Garber**, Professor of Marketplace Theology, Regent College; author, *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good*

"Only recently has the evangelical church begun to pay attention to the challenge of discipling Christians for their public life and, in particular, to the integration of their faith with their vocations and work lives. Dan Doriani's book makes an important contribution to this literature. Dan is an academic who wears his considerable scholarship lightly as he writes a theologically rich but accessible book on the Christian and work. His clear teaching on how faithful work leads to social reform is especially provocative and helpful."

—**Timothy Keller**, Founding Pastor, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, Manhattan; Chairman and Cofounder, Redeemer City to City (CTC)

"I am grateful for mentors such as Dan Doriani, whose insights draw us back to the truths that guide us in loving God and living well. In this latest volume, Dan reminds us that the *first* 'Great Commission' happened in Genesis, when God charged Adam and Eve (and us) to tend God's garden and exercise dominion over his creation. With characteristic wisdom and practical guidance, Dan paints a compelling vision for all good work. He also dismantles the false dichotomy between work that is 'sacred' and work that is 'secular'—for God has instilled creative and redemptive significance in the calling of executives, artists, sanitation workers, landscapers, and homemakers, just as he has done for pastors and missionaries. Together, we are all commissioned and 'sent' workers in God's field. For these and many other reasons, I highly commend this book."

—**Scott Sauls**, Senior Pastor, Christ Presbyterian Church, Nashville, Tennessee; author, *From Weakness to Strength* and *Irresistible Faith*

"I love my friend's new book! Dan was teaching on the relationship between faith, work, and culture long before this topic became popular. So as I read these chapters, it was like savoring a vintage wine—the fruit of time, reflection, and distillation. With a high view of creation, a great love for the gospel, and the hope of Christ's kingdom stirring in his heart, Dan has given us a wonderful introduction to a biblical theology of work. It is accessible, practical, and brimming with Dan's wonderful personality."

—**Scotty Smith**, Pastor Emeritus, Christ Community Church, Franklin, Tennessee; Teacher in Residence, West End Community Church, Nashville, Tennessee

"A concise yet comprehensive must-read for the thoughtful and committed Christian embedded in the 'secular' workplace. Dan Doriani has masterfully captured the nuances of the twenty-first-century workaday world, covering a wide range of topics from discerning God's calling to dealing with difficult corporate situations and contemporary dilemmas, such as overwork and underemployment. Doriani skillfully explains pertinent theological principles in everyday language, lacing

his narrative with compelling true-life illustrations and applications. Whether answering God's calling on the shop floor, in the corporate office, or in the home, the reader will find practical and theologically sound answers here."

—**Franz J. Wippold II**, Emeritus Professor of Radiology, Washington University, St. Louis

WORK

WORK

ITS PURPOSE, DIGNITY, AND TRANSFORMATION

DANIEL M. DORIANI

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For Estelle and Jonah
May you always love reading in the company of friends.
To you I dedicate this book.

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

In his excellent *Work: Its Purpose, Dignity, and Transformation*, my friend Dan Doriani states that he has written this for "all who want to practice love and justice in their work, whether they be professionals or laborers, business leaders or artisans, students, retirees, or stay-at-home parents." He especially focuses on two kinds of people:

> The first kind doubts the value of their labor. When asked about their work, they often begin with two words: "I just." They say, "I just watch children," "I just stock shelves," "I just market clothing," or "I just transport vegetables." Yes, but anyone who ships vegetables efficiently makes life better for numerous people, many of them poor. That said, I'm no "Your work matters" cheerleader. Indeed, some work is so shoddy and trivial that it barely seems to matter.

The second kind of person is typified by

> the woman who ardently yearns to do significant work, the man who dares to think his work can change his corner of the world. In this, I join John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, and their followers as they affirm that Jesus is Lord of every domain, not merely the church. Jesus declares that he rules everything when he says that the kingdom of God has *arrived* (Matt. 12:28; Luke 11:20). When the Gospels *show* Jesus working, whether

> teaching crowds or healing the sick, the physicality of his activity demonstrates that redemption reshapes all of life—the body, not just the spirit.

Work will equip menial laborers and potential world-transformers to glorify God in all they do; to see how their Christian faith should shape their work globally, no matter what their jobs; and to understand how Christ's kingdom can be manifested in *all* their labors and undertakings.

When you begin to recognize the aspects of your vocation that can honor God, then you see that that all kinds of work possess qualities of dignity—not just the jobs of preachers or presidents, and not just those of CEOs and surgeons. God is calling the cop and the carpenter and the concrete layer to experience the dignity of their work as he uses their jobs to help others, improve lives, and spread the influence of his kingdom in the world—in the skills they express, in the products they make, in the way they work, in the impact of their labors on society, and in the relationships affected by their work.

An early description of how society began to flourish and diversify with God's blessing is found in Genesis 4:19–22: "Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. Zillah also bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron."

In this description of the very earliest stages of human history, we find God's creativity and expanding blessings being expressed in the diverse professions and vocations of his people. Some are raising livestock. Others are musicians. Some are craftsmen or metalworkers. All these different professions are being established as the means by which society is advancing under God's plan—a plan honoring every vocation that furthers God's purposes.

Dan concludes *Work* by saying that despite human sin, the cultural mandate (that is, God's charge to the first humans to govern and develop the earth) still stands. Because Christ, the King, has come, his kingdom has arrived; his lordship is to be manifest in every realm of life, including our work. Work is not merely about making a living while avoiding sin; it about extending the kingdom rule of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I heartily recommend *Work* to all Christians who long to understand how their occupations and vocations fit into God's great kingdom plan.

Bryan Chapell
Pastor, Grace Presbyterian Church
President Emeritus, Covenant Theological Seminary

PREFACE

I earned my first legal paycheck in 1970, when I lived on the coast in North Carolina and worked at the improbably named but immensely popular Sanitary Restaurant. The restaurant sat on the water, so fishing boats could dock at the back in the late afternoon and early evening. At best, they moved fish and shrimp from the open sea to the dinner plate in less than an hour. The décor was simple, the prices were low, and the lines stretched around the block on weekends. I was a lowly kitchen hand, slopping plates and loading the dishwasher in a steamy, undersized space. During peak hours, our equipment couldn't manage the load. When the overburdened garbage disposal choked on discarded food, it made an ominous "wub-wub-wub" sound, and then belched, spraying fragments of fish, French fries, and hush puppies onto our aprons, faces, and hair. Some nights, we had to throw food into trash cans. When they filled, we tossed the refuse from every fourth or fifth plate on the floor. When the slop was ankle-deep, we threw wooden pallets over it in order to walk safely. Once, a pallet submerged into the accumulating muck, and we added a second. After the rush, we lifted and washed the pallets and shoveled smashed fish and fries into the now-docile disposal. The experience gave ample food for thought. Why did we *like* the explosions of fish debris? Why were those terrible nights so exhilarating? Why did we feel like conquerors afterward? Why didn't the restaurant raise its prices marginally and improve the kitchen?

Work has always fascinated me. As a child, I learned that one of my grandfathers had been a farmer and the other a musician. Both seemed marvelous. I enjoyed interviewing hundreds of people about their work, whether for this book or during my years as lead pastor at a large, professionally diverse church. Work demands deep training and absorbs vast energy. At work, we prove and improve ourselves, even find ourselves. If not, at least we earn a living.

In this book I hope to engage all who want to practice love and justice in their work, whether they be professionals or laborers, business leaders or artisans, students, retirees, or stay-at-home parents. Still, I especially write for two kinds of people. The first kind doubts the value of their labor. When asked about their work, they often begin with two words: "I just." They say, "I just watch children," "I just stock shelves," "I just market clothing," or "I just transport vegetables." Yes, but anyone who ships vegetables efficiently makes life better for numerous people, many of them poor. That said, I'm no "Your work matters" cheerleader. Indeed, some work is so shoddy and trivial that it barely seems to matter.

I also write for a second kind of person, the woman who ardently yearns to do significant work, the man who dares to think his work can change his corner of the world. In this, I join John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, and their followers as they affirm that Jesus is Lord of every domain, not merely the church. Jesus declares that he rules everything when he says that the kingdom of God has *arrived* (Matt. 12:28; Luke 11:20). When the Gospels *show* Jesus working, whether teaching crowds or healing the sick, the physicality of his activity demonstrates that redemption reshapes all of life—the body, not just the spirit.

I write as a theologian, but for most of my career, I have taught New Testament and biblical interpretation and preached expository sermons from Scripture. This book is therefore grounded in the text of Scripture. I generally give the results, not the process of the exegetical work, but readers will detect signs of the process when I switch translations. I generally prefer the ESV

translation, which is accurate and reliable. I quote others when they seem to best convey the sense of the Hebrew or Greek original. I sometimes quote two translations because each presents a vital dimension of the text. The goal is always to communicate the sense of Scripture, especially as it shapes our understanding of work.

I explain the twelve principles guiding this book at the end of chapter 1. One principle stands behind them all, the conviction that a biblical theology of work begins with the character of God. We are creative because God is creative. We long to fix what is broken because he planned to heal this aching world. We love to finish a task, even if it requires suffering, because Jesus finished the task of redemption, at great cost. So the character of God shapes the character of our work.

My interests reveal themselves in the plan for this monograph. Chapters 1–4 are foundational. They define work, summarize the biblical teaching on it, and explore the most influential theories of work. Chapters 5–8 address core topics: calling, faithfulness, work amid hardship, and the rhythm of work and rest. The last two chapters explore the way in which Christians strive to reform the workplace or society at large. Those chapters offer a theology or apologetic for the project of attempting to bring reformation through work. Finally, the appendix offers biblical principles for ten common fields of labor.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Like every author, I have an army of friends and allies who deserve my gratitude. First, I thank Jack White, Robert Tweed, and Pete Steen of Geneva College for introducing me to the social implications of Calvinism, and I thank my classmates Tim and Tom Bennett, Mike Foyle, and Jim Dittmar for the first battles over "Christian lightbulbs." I am grateful to the leaders of Covenant Seminary for a job description that includes writing as a duty and grants me time to fulfill it. We don't have research professors, but this comes close. Many other friends removed flaws, improved the style, and added helpful thoughts to this book. Of them, Jay Wippold, Robbie Griggs, Vicki Tatko, John Hughes, and Debbie Doriani deserve singular praise.

If this book has a distinctive flavor, it is due to the dozens of people who sat for official interviews and the hundreds who endured strings of question in rambling, informal sessions. Special thanks to Abby, Debbie, Nancy 1 and Nancy 2, Sarah, Shelley, Bill, Bruce, Dave, David, Gerry, Joe 1 and Joe 2, Rand, Russ, and Tyler for sharing your insights again and again. Hundreds of students listened to parts of this book in lectures; their questions, objections, and suggestions made this work stronger, as did the feedback from everyone who worked through early drafts and pushed me to do better.

This book was delayed, but its scribe was happier, due to the sweet distractions afforded by Estelle and Jonah in their regular, if extralegal, visits to my home office. Jonah, thanks for bringing

me book after book to read before your afternoon naps. And Estelle, thanks for the way you held my hands and shouted for joy the day you found out that I don't just read books—I write them.

My hope, when I start to read a book, is that I will learn something on every page. I learned more than I expected as I wrote this book, and I pray that you, O reader, will learn and, if possible, find courage to act through these pages.

PART 1

FOUNDATIONS

1

INTRODUCTION

The Personal Nature of Work

We spend most of our waking hours working. At work we fulfill many of our noblest dreams and endure many of our greatest sorrows. At work we do things *for* people and we do things *to* people, and they return the favor. Through work we feed our families and serve our neighbors. Through work we hone skills and make friends. When we work, we face our sin and the world's brokenness, and yet we discover grounds for hope. Mindless work crushes the soul; yet even in the midst of tedious work, we may find ourselves and our place in society. I did.

My story of work begins with my father. He had enough charm and intelligence to land any job he wanted, and he did so, whether in government, construction, higher education, or the church. However, his self-discipline did not match his gifts, so he found it easier to get a job than to keep one. His setbacks troubled him, and he took out his frustrations on me, perhaps because he saw traces of himself in me. Over and over he told me that I was lazy, worthless, good for nothing, and that I always would be. Perhaps he was projecting his fears about himself onto me, but as a child, I could not see that. Children assume that whatever their parents say must be true. Besides, the charge of laziness was fair at times.

In college I began to work as if bent on avenging every lost hour and silencing my father. My mentors taught me that God

intends to redeem all of life, and I dared to believe my labors could change the world. I resolved to become a professor and tore through graduate programs at great speed while neglecting things like sleep.

I've probably worked too hard ever since, toiling as professor, pastor, academic leader, speaker, writer, editor, and unlicensed and unpaid counselor. While in school, I washed dishes, sold hardware, tended machines, prepared food, harvested crops, unloaded trucks, guarded factories, and either painted or demolished buildings, as bosses decreed. I found particular delight in teaching—so much so, that I would do it for free if I never had to grade exams. My motives have been mixed, as motives typically are, though throughout my working life I have wanted to make the world a better place. And I still want to make the world a better place, earn respect, and silence my father's reproaches, although he died more than a decade before I wrote this book.

I share a fragment of my story here because work is so personal. For many of us, our first waking thoughts turn to work. On a typical day, our main activity is work, whether paid or unpaid, ongoing or episodic. At work we earn food and shelter. Through work we find mentors and become mentors to others. At work we have the ability to promote or to damage the common good. And our history constantly shapes our efforts.

Our work shapes and defines us. Europeans laugh at the American tendency to ask people about their occupation, but it makes sense since work both forms and reveals the spirit. Whatever our job, it leads us to acquire certain skills and mindsets. Scripture often identifies people by their work. Matthew called Pilate "the governor," and Jesus called Nicodemus "the teacher of Israel" (Matt. 27:2; John 3:10). David is "the king," Nathan "the prophet," Lydia "a seller of purple goods," and Luke "the beloved physician" (1 Chron. 29:9; 2 Sam. 7:2; Acts 16:14; Col. 4:14). Jesus is "the carpenter" and "the prophet" (Mark 6:3; Matt. 21:11). Of course, we are *more* than our occupations. If a journalist is also a father, mountain climber, juggler, jazz

pianist, chess player, and prison volunteer, we miss the man if we stop at *journalist*.

So work is personal, but it is social too. Whatever our skills, our community shapes the work itself and the way we experience it. The status of an occupation varies from one time and place to another. The esteem and compensation given to farmers, physicians, drivers, teachers, salespeople, entertainers, carpenters, pastors, domestic laborers, and engineers rise and fall according to the social needs and economic perspectives of each era. Like living things, occupations are born, they mature, and they die. Today we have software designers and cosmetologists; in past decades we had ice cutters and town criers. Muscle power, once so vital, is dwindling in importance while mental and emotional skills are surging in value. Even when occupations endure, they change. In colonial days, almost 90 percent of Americans farmed, either part-time or exclusively. Farm families had an array of skills that are now performed by specialists. Today only 2 percent of North Americans are farmers because crop yields have increased so sharply in recent years.[1] Farmers now need expertise in finance and equipment, since machines plant, fertilize, and harvest food. Machines even milk and inseminate cows. In its use of advanced technology, farming is typical of many sectors of the economy. Manufacturing and production jobs constantly move toward automation and specialization because this increases productivity. Artificial intelligence is on the horizon and promises to increase the rate of change and reward those with the skill or flexibility to adapt to it. Yet it threatens workers who resist adaptation. These shifting trends constantly alter life for both individuals and society. Though machines deliver us from backbreaking toil, they also eliminate the need for physical skills.

1. "Occupational Outlook Handbook: Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers," April 13, 2018, United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, https://www.bls.gov/ooh/management/farmers-ranchers-and-other-agricultural-managers.htm.

Economic and technological trends consistently reshape work. We dismiss dystopian fiction, in which a dilapidated humanity falls to the machines it created, but that fiction sells because it engages real fears. Employers constantly demand new skills from their workers, and many try to squeeze ever more output from full-time employees. At the same time, the number of freelance laborers keeps growing. The sheer variety of names for the part-time worker's economy—the gig economy, the peer economy, the platform economy—suggests a field in flux. Whether by choice or by necessity, in 2017, 36 percent of American workers earned a living on an on-demand or contingent basis, and the percentage is rising steadily.[2] They cater meals; drive vehicles; wait tables; consult with businesses; repair, clean, and share homes; and care for pets. They write everything from manuals to scripts to computer code in the effort to string together income. In the gig economy, workers gain both freedom and uncertainty, since they never know when the next income-producing task will appear.

Physically, we spend more time sitting and talking than we did in ages past. Epidemic rates of obesity and diabetes reflect the decline in physical toil. Research and technology are opening exciting vistas for inventors and designers. But rising stress levels in medicine, technology, finance, and the military are alarming. Meanwhile, onerous tasks remain. People still trap rats, collect garbage, wash floors, enforce the law, and comply with government regulations. Recent changes make it all the more important to know the enduring biblical principles for work.

A Definition of Work

To think clearly about work, we need to define it. David Miller labels work as "human activity that has both intrinsic and extrinsic value; that involves physical and emotional energy;

2. Stephane Kasriel, "Four Predictions for the Future of Work," December 5, 2017, World Economic Forum, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/12/predictions-for-freelance-work-education.

that can be both tedious and exhilarating; and that often is done out of necessity and in exchange for financial remuneration but also is done out of joy and in return for self-fulfillment and accomplishment." Miller knows that work can be drudgery or delight, voluntary or mandatory, meaningful or meaningless, satisfying or soul-crushing. Miller finally defines work as "a sustained exercise of strength and skill that overcomes obstacles to produce or accomplish something."[3] Miller rightly observes that work requires *sustained* action. One needs a willingness to suffer in order to finish arduous tasks. By Miller's definition, *work* is also broader than *employment*. The employed get material compensation in return for time, energy, and skill spent on assigned tasks. But unpaid labor, whether preparing food, tending children, mowing grass, or helping refugees, is work too.[4]

Work and *Good* Work

This book will study work, but it especially aims to promote *good* work. Years ago, scholars distinguished the *being* and the *well-being* of great institutions like marriage, civil authority, and work. In that spirit, I interviewed dozens of people, asking, "Do you like your work? If so, why?" I hoped to locate common themes and to promote faithful, constructive, and rewarding labor. Drawing on Scripture, the vast literature on work, and interviews, I propose that *good* work has five elements: need, talent, disciplined effort, direction, and correct social appraisal. We will begin with need.

Good work *meets real needs*. It provides food, clothing, shelter, education, and medical care. Historically, most people tilled fields and tended animals to feed and clothe themselves. Good work also lets people flourish through education, invention,

3. David Miller, *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 19.

4. An activity like childcare clarifies the connection between work and paid employment. Parents work when changing a diaper as surely as childcare workers do. If both parties meet the same need, they both work, whether they receive payment or not.

communication, entertainment, and the arts. When laborers meet needs, they love their neighbors, near and far. Buildings, musical instruments, and furniture can last for centuries, so quality work produces an enduring product and lets us serve neighbors not yet born.

Talent is the ability to acquire meaningful skills quickly. The boy who runs faster than anyone else at school is talented. So is the boy who remembers whatever he hears. Scripture calls talents "gifts" because they are God-given (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Peter 4:10). People say they like work that challenges them and helps them transform their talents into mature skills.

Effort and *discipline* enter when a gifted runner meets a coach who tells him what his speed could accomplish on a soccer field. Will he strive to become a champion? Discipline is also seen when a boy finds that he can remember as he *chooses* and then chooses wisely. As a young man, John Calvin had a prodigious memory. He honed his gift by spending time each night reviewing the reading of the day and fixing the essentials in his mind. It served him well.

Direction is essential too. Years ago, a prime minister compared capable people to battleships. Engineers design warships to project power as instruments of state. Their structure is set, but their direction is essential.[5] Do the authorities direct captains to conquer defenseless people or to protect their borders? In World War II, Adolf Hitler and Winston Churchill both had great rhetorical talent and persuaded their people to fight for a cause. But they had opposite *directions*. Hitler stirred resentment to motivate conquest of peaceful neighboring nations. Churchill roused Britain to defend itself.

Finally, for work to flourish, it needs *the right social appraisal*. Society continually appraises work in a market economy. To stay in business, companies need to make a profit. If no one wants to buy their products and services at a price that is profitable for the

5. Chapter 9 develops the theme of structure and direction.

company, perhaps the company's work is inferior. But markets err too; great music and technology can languish undiscovered. Even on a strictly economic level, social appraisal can be faulty.

Faulty appraisal causes other problems as well. In market economies citizens pay attention to products that sell, to companies that make a profit, and to jobs that pay well, whether they are constructive or not. At present, the United States pays its best athletes and actors up to one thousand times more than its teachers. Superb athletes and entertainers can earn $500,000 per week, while superb elementary schoolteachers may earn $500,000 per decade. Market economies devalue common skills, however important they are. It's hard to change pay scales, but we can at least *see* the men and women who clean floors and tables. After all, if all garbage collectors and politicians disappeared simultaneously, whom would society miss first? Market economies especially devalue volunteer labor, since no money changes hands. Stay-at-home parents and volunteers do essential work, whether paid or not. We should honor work that meets needs and promotes justice and mercy.

"All Work Is Equal"—Truth or Rhetoric?

Christian authors like to say all labor has equal dignity. They rightly question the old distinction between sacred and secular work and affirm that all honest labor pleases God. To wash dishes, clothes, and floors is to serve God. God blesses mechanics, farmers, and preachers alike, if they fulfill their callings. Important as these points are, they are not the *whole* truth. In our zeal to motivate individual workers, we act like cheerleaders, shouting, "Your work matters! It lasts forever, whatever you do." But motivational cheering neglects vital distinctions. In fact, some work neither lasts long nor matters much. Promotional items, for example, can be so flimsy that they are essentially debris—why make them?

The statement "All work matters" invites the motivational but imprecise thought that stock clerks matter as much as executives.

As a human being, everyone matters equally, but at work, those who lead have more impact. When I asked people, "Do you like your job?" many answers began with, "I do because my boss . . ." A godly kitchen hand is God's light in the restaurant, but the chef shapes the entire kitchen's structure and culture, making it a joyful or stressful place for all. I once worked on a four-man maintenance crew in which everyone was injured within three months. Why? Because antiquated equipment and hot liquids were everywhere, and the boss didn't protect his people. Unemployment was high. If one man quit, replacements lined up at the boss's door. The maintenance crew was disposable. Because the head of maintenance permitted a workplace filled with dangers and void of safeguards, the crew's efforts to avoid injury were doomed. In this sense, the work of the leader mattered the most. True leaders create healthy work environments. That includes the provision of proper equipment.

So the saying "All work is equal" is true from one perspective, but empty rhetoric from another. All work is equal in that a stock clerk and an executive can *please God* equally. And every honest job has equal dignity. But an executive shapes a company, and even society, in a way that a stock clerk never will, and it's ludicrous to pretend otherwise. As a former pastor and a former stock boy, I'm sure I did more good with a strong sermon for a thousand people than I did when I put olives in the most convenient spot for a low-ranking cook.

Jesus said, "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more" (Luke 12:48). Great gifts bring great responsibilities. If the Lord has given you the skill and opportunity to lead, seize it and do good (Gal. 6:10; Eph. 5:17). Beyond that, talented leaders attract bold people. When David, so skilled in music and war, had to flee from a deranged King Saul, hundreds of men rallied to his side. Dozens eventually became "mighty men" (2 Sam. 23:8–39). So, yes, all work is important, but leadership is more important.

Justice, Social Reform, and Work

This leads us to ask if a believer is free to take any job, provided it's legal. First, we need to define *legal*. For centuries, gladiatorial "games" and animal fighting were legal and popular with a certain crowd. We cringe to think that men fought each other to the death or that people trained dogs to kill bulls, bears, and other dogs for sport. But which occupations will seem loathsome in a century? Gambling? Boxing? Football, with all its concussions? Might lawyers excoriate the adversarial system in a century? Might industry spurn the burning of oil, gas, and coal?

Gambling is a good test case, since it's legal and widespread. On one level, we can say work is good if it allows workers to do justice to their neighbors, near and far. To press deeper, work is good, first, if it is moral. Second, work is good if it builds character and evil if it wounds character. Third, toil is good if it achieves good goals but evil if it is aimless or harmful. Fourth, work is good if it pleases God, conforms to the structures of his world, and fits his vision of the good.

Let's apply these tests to the gambling industry. To some, gambling seems like harmless entertainment or even a social good, since state lotteries fund education. Others call it theft, since it takes a person's money without offering a good or service (except diversion). Winners deprive neighbors of their money, and losers deprive themselves or their families. Gambling debases character by encouraging people to take money without offering anything in return. It achieves no noble goals; it preys on the poor, and it fosters addiction. It shatters the families of chronic gamblers and contradicts God's order by exalting chance and offering wealth without labor or planning. Therefore, believers should not work in the gambling industry, even if they have a knack for it. One can be *skilled* at boxing and gambling, but that doesn't make boxing and gambling *good* work.

Here are questions we can use to appraise our work: Does my job advance the common good? Do I help people or exploit them? Am I glad to tell people what I do? Do I please the Lord as I earn

my bread, or do I merely earn my bread? Can I joyfully present my work to the Lord? If we can't answer these questions properly and with a clear conscience, we should probably seek different work. Or, if we have the right position, we could try to reform our organization. To say it another way: too much Christian instruction on work urges disciples to be faithful in the work assigned to them. Not enough consider, "Should we do this work?"

Leaders should ask themselves: Is the work I oversee good? Should it be redesigned, strengthened, or even abolished? This book often calls for *reform*, but there are products and activities that should be eliminated, not restructured. So much labor goes to tasks that are pointless, even destructive by most measures. This holds true in obvious cases, like gambling, pornography, or cigarette production. But should we produce food that is high in calories and barely nutritious, even if demand for it stays strong? Should we devote talent and energy to creating violent video games that are calibrated to addict their players? Some work is perfectly legal but utterly immoral. I am *not* asking that we outlaw potato chips, but I am asking whether disciples should devote their lives to marketing potato chips.

By questioning marginal labor, we guard an important principle: to do good work, we need more than skill, persistence, and good motives; we must do good to "the other," who receives our efforts. Labor has effects in the external world. All acts have social consequences; therefore disciples must ask, "Does my work contribute to the common good?"[6] In short, work can be skillful, legal, and profitable, yet dishonorable. We must focus on *both* the subjective side of work (the laborer's skills and attitude) *and* the objective aspect (the results of the toil). So the statement "Whatever you do, give it your best effort" is simplistic at best and misleading at worst. Some tasks do not merit our best effort.

Thus, we *hope* to find work that demands our greatest skill

6. Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues: Justice* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1954, 1966), 59–62.

and effort. At times, evil work merits sabotage. Laborers in Hitler's munitions plants rightly botched the manufacture of war materials. Other tasks deserve benign neglect or judicious minimalism. Human energies are finite, and we should preserve them for demanding and consequential tasks. Why give our best to sweeping floors, dressing toddlers, raking leaves, or grading elementary school book reports? But other work summons our strongest efforts to sustain the good or to reform evils.

For example, the current American criminal justice system has a great need for reform.[7] The United States has the highest incarceration rates in the Western world and alarming rates of recidivism. Complicating matters, over past decades, many acts that were once civil offenses have been reclassified as felonies. Driving with a suspended license and sleeping in a library are often felonies, not misdemeanors. Therefore, even though rates of violent crime fell for decades, the legal code drives ever more criminal arrests and prosecutions. Courts could not handle the increased case load, so prosecutors, defenders, and judges began to rely on plea bargaining to settle more criminal cases.

The goal of the plea bargain is efficiency. If prosecutors believe a person is guilty of armed robbery, they make the accused an offer: Plead guilty to a lesser offense, such as illegal possession of a firearm, and get a light sentence—perhaps six months or even time served awaiting trial. Or go to trial and face the possibility of a decade in prison. In one case, a sixteen-year-old participated very marginally in an attempted robbery that ended with stitches for the restaurant manager. The teenager then faced this choice: plead guilty and get one year in prison and two years on probation, or go to trial and face possible life in prison without parole.[8]

7. I bypass the analysis of police misconduct. The police, lawyers, and judges should be faithful to laws regulating them, whether the criminal-judicial system needs reform or not.

8. In 2010 the case reached the Supreme Court, which judged the life-without-parole sentence that the man ultimately received (for complex reasons) to be unconstitutional.

According to Donald Dripps, a noted law professor, this system "creates incentives that induce rational, innocent people to plead guilty."[9] It is especially onerous for the poor. If the defendant is too poor to raise bail money, he will have to await trial in jail. This essentially negates the principle "innocent until proven guilty" and creates a double standard: the poor await trial in jail while the rich await trial at home.

Further, the rich can afford strong legal representation, but the poor rely on overtaxed, underpaid public defenders. With nominal representation, an innocent person will sensibly choose a year in jail, even for a crime he or she did not commit, over the possibility of a decade in prison.[10] This makes the system more efficient, but less just. For one thing, a guilty plea generates a criminal record that follows the accused for life. Worse, many convicted criminals are, in fact, innocent. In early studies, the legal community found that DNA testing exonerated *one-quarter* of convicted criminals.[11] In the plea-bargaining system, which resolves over 90 percent of all criminal cases, expediency prevails over justice. Remember the testimony of Scripture: "Woe to those . . . who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of his right!" (Isa. 5:22–23). Again, "He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD" (Prov. 17:15). It will be most difficult to change this plea-bargaining system. May the Lord bless the lawyers and politicians who give sustained effort to reform.

9. Donald Dripps, "Guilt, Innocence, and Due Process in Plea Bargaining," *William and Mary Law Review* 57, 4 (2016): 1347. The entire article (pp. 1343–93), is instructive.

10. Ibid., 1363. Dripps also quotes John Gleeson, a federal judge, who says that "prosecutors routinely threaten ultraharsh, enhanced mandatory sentences that *no one*—not even the prosecutors themselves—thinks are appropriate" (ibid., 1356). See also Dan Simon, "The Limited Diagnosticity of Criminal Trials," *Vanderbilt Law Review*, 64, 1 (2011): 218.

11. Edward Connors, Thomas Lundregan, Neal Miller, and Tom McEwan, *Convicted by Juries, Exonerated by Science: Case Studies in the Use of DNA Evidence to Establish Innocence after Trial* (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 1996), xix, 20, 78, https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/dnaevid.pdf.

Corporate Aspects of Work

No one can reform a nation's judicial system alone. That reminds us that a biblical ethic of work has both corporate and individual elements. Solomon says, "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. . . . A threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Eccl. 4:9, 12). A band of allies can accomplish what no individual can. Because Western culture tilts toward individualism, we affirm the corporate or communal thrust of Israel's law as it touches work. Biblical narratives quietly make this point by juxtaposing descriptions of godless societies and Israel. At Babel, humanity unites in rebellion against God (Gen. 11). In Genesis 12:2–3, God counters by calling Abraham and promising, "I will make of you a great nation . . . and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." In Genesis 18–19, God calls Abraham's household to do "righteousness and justice," in contrast with Sodom, a city marked by lusts and violence (18:19–20; 19:4–5). So ethics is a social concern and "not simply a compendium of moral teaching to enable . . . individuals to lead privately upright lives."[12] When we read Scripture, we should ask both "What does this require of me?" and "How does it shape our community?"

Cain's question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9) sounds reasonable to an individualist but not to an Israelite, because the people *did* keep each other. Consider this law: "When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring the guilt of blood upon your house, if anyone should fall from it" (Deut. 22:8). Because Israelites worked, entertained, and slept on their roofs, it made sense to build retaining walls—parapets—around them. In the heat this kept Joshua, that reckless child, or Aunt Abishag, an overactive sleeper, from tumbling off the roof. It prevented the "guilt of blood."

12. Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 48–51.

An individualist wants to claim, "I would never fall off a roof. Why should I build walls to safeguard fools?" The law in Deuteronomy, however, says fools *are* our responsibility. If they fall off our roofs, *we* are guilty because we didn't protect our neighbor. Justice and mercy are core values for societies as well as individuals (Matt. 23:23; Mic. 6:8). A just and merciful city protects people who are reckless enough to pitch off a roof.

We may think, "I would never fall from a roof," but everyone has self-destructive tendencies. Without God's help, we all destroy ourselves. But God loves people who fall off buildings. The command to put up parapets is a biblical principle. It means that God chooses to protect fools and addicts, liars and thieves. God's love for self-damaging people led Jesus to his work: the work of redemption. That redemption is the foundation for all that follows, and we are right to believe that it renews our work as it renews our soul.

God-Centered Work

The topic of work is complex, so it is best to state the fundamental biblical principles before proceeding. First, I want to ground all work in the person and work of the triune God. Second, I enumerate twelve principles that guide this project.

First, then, we are creative because the Creator made mankind in his image. Certainly, no human can create *ex nihilo* ("out of nothing"), as God did, but we can create in a secondary sense by reshaping existing materials. Of course, since mankind is rational and relational, our creativity touches more than physical materials. Second, our desire to mend the broken, improve the insufficient, and optimize the inefficient echoes God's resolve to redeem his broken world. Third, our drive to make plans and accomplish them echoes the God who planned and accomplished redemption. Like the Son, we can embrace great projects and say, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work" (John 4:34). When we complete our work, we may even exult "It is finished," as Jesus did (19:30). Fourth,

the Spirit renews us in the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29), so that believers are Christomorphic—formed by Christ and reshaped to become more like him.

If our life is indeed Christomorphic, we may expect to complete our work with the sweat of our brow and with the blood of suffering, for Jesus' work brought him unique anguish. As with Jesus, our efforts to reverse the results of sin will elicit resistance. Workers who are intent on reforming work must be willing to suffer for their cause, as Jesus did. With these God-centered principles in hand, we can list the first principles for a biblical theology of work. Most will be familiar, but stating our twelve foundational principles from the outset seems right. Every chapter assumes and develops the following principles:

1. God works and ordains that humans work. The Lord created heaven and earth and sustains his creation daily (Gen. 1:1–2:4; Isa. 45:18; Col. 1:16–17). Because God made us in his image, we can express creativity as we develop, sustain, and protect his world. Furthermore, since God chose to work and commissioned Adam and Eve to work before they rebelled, we should not view labor as a burden. Various forms of work are difficult, but in itself, work is good (Gen. 1:26; 2:15).
2. The Lord worked six days and rested one, setting both a pattern and a limit for humanity. The Lord said, "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath. . . . On it you shall not do any work" (Ex. 20:9–10). The Lord both works and rests. His pattern leads away from two common errors: ceaseless toil and laziness. He corrects both workaholics and sluggards. He says "Mankind must work" and also "People must stop working." There is more to humanity than toil. Like God, we work, rest, and reflect. The law instructs the faithful to work six days, then rest, but after Jesus'

resurrection, the week begins with a celebration of redemption and rest.

3. By working with his hands, Jesus showed that all honest labor is noble. By performing manual labor, Jesus honored shepherds, farmers, carpenters, servants, and everyone else who uses muscle power. When Paul commanded believers to work with their hands (Eph. 4:28), he ennobled manual labor, which Greek society typically scorned. Today, technological devices minimize manual labor. Machines dig ditches and assemble automobiles. An array of power tools make contruction and repair vastly easier. Nevertheless, the Lord respects both mental and physical labor.
4. Mankind's rebellion led God to curse the ground. As a result, work became toil and frustration. Today, thorns and thistles blight human labor. Disorder and entropy afflict creation. Sin mars all our activity (Gen. 3:17; Rom. 8:18–23). Since Babel, all communication is fraught with misunderstanding (Gen. 11:1–9). Even the best job has jarring and painful moments.
5. Labor is mandatory for survival. The earth does not dispense food or clothing to those who put forth no effort. We must work to live. Therefore, "If a man will not work he shall not eat" (2 Thess. 3:10), and "Anyone who does not provide for his family is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8). We lose sight of this since many individuals, especially the sick, the young, and the old, may not work. Collectively, we must toil. This reminds us that work has individual and corporate aspects. Our work ethic cannot merely attend to individual experience. The world is complex. People must work together to survive, and collaboration changes us.
6. Work shapes human identity. People called Jesus "the carpenter" (Mark 6:3). When Scripture identifies people as priests, fishermen, soldiers, merchants, or tax

collectors, it acknowledges the link between work and identity. Through our work we shape the world, but our work also shapes us. It leads us to gain certain skills and to see the world in light of our skills and experiences. Nonetheless, God primarily establishes human identity by making man in his image and adopting believers into his family.

7. Work and vocation are not identical. Jesus worked with wood and stone, and Paul made tents, but they had other God-given callings. Men and women can temporarily labor in a field while moving toward a position that better fits their gifts and interests. Vocation entails service in the place where God has given gifts and a desire to make a difference in this world.
8. The Lord assigns places of work, yet believers can move. "Were you a slave when called?" Paul asks. "Do not be concerned about it." But Paul also tells slaves to "gain your freedom" if you can (1 Cor. 7:17–24). Therefore, we affirm a dual truth: (a) God assigns believers to specific roles or callings, and (b) he permits them to move if there is good reason.
9. Human abilities vary, and God respects them all. One's principal duty is to exercise the talents God bestows, whether many or few (Matt. 25:14–30). Steadfast labor counts; fruit matters too (Pss. 1:3; 92:14; Isa. 32:1–8; 45:8; John 15; Rom. 7:4–5). God honors what seems dishonorable and calls it indispensable (1 Cor. 12:21–26). We should exercise our most strategic gifts as far as possible. Still, each society has its notions of noble and ignoble occupations, and they may not align with God's appraisal.
10. Many human tasks are a direct result of the fall, yet no one should despise labor that mitigates the effects of sin. After all, Jesus' work of redemption "merely" reversed the effects of sin. When Jesus said "I am working" in John 5:17 after a disappointing encounter with a man he had healed, he

confessed that his ministry was toil. Likewise, our work has dignity even if we merely restrain the effects of sin. Because the Lord worked hard to accomplish redemption, we can work "heartily, as for the Lord" (Col. 3:23; Eph. 6:5–9), even on tasks that follow the fall. Garbage collection, pest extermination, and care for the terminally ill are therefore dignified.

11. God calls every disciple to full-time service. We deny that some work is sacred and some secular. Faithful farmers, manufacturers, engineers, teachers, homemakers, and drivers please God as surely as faithful pastors do. As long as their work is honest, disciples can always pray "Thy kingdom come" as they work (Matt. 6:10, 33).
12. In our work, we can become the hands of God. When we ask for daily bread, God grants it through farmers, bakers, and grocers. When we pray for clothing and shelter, he gives it through shepherds, cotton farmers, and construction workers. Human service often goes unseen (Matt. 25:31–46). Toil is often invisible, like the stage crew and business managers behind the actors in a play. Here too, we detect an echo of God's work, since the Spirit's work is often unseen.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe your work. What tasks do you perform for pay? What do you do in your home and in your community?
2. Describe the example your parents, mentors, and significant peers set regarding how you should or should not work? What did you learn from their strengths? Their weaknesses? Have you let either one shape you too much?
3. Do you work too hard? Not enough? What would your friends say about the way you work?
4. How has your work shaped you or even defined you? Do you like the way it has shaped you? Why or why not?

5. Do you believe all work is equal? In what sense is the cheer "Your work matters" true and important? How can it be misleading?
6. How does the work of God the Creator and Jesus the Redeemer shape you as a whole? As a worker?