**THE HOLINESS OF WORK**

**INTRODUCTION**

Over the course of these four lessons, we will listen to and reflect upon a series of short video interviews with the late pastor and theologian Eugene H. Peterson, conducted by the Denver Institute for Faith and Work. The title of the course is “The Holiness of Work.”

Before proceeding with the lessons, please visit the following link:

[**https://classroom.denverinstitute.org/courses/the-holiness-of-work**](https://classroom.denverinstitute.org/courses/the-holiness-of-work)

**IMPORTANT**: Click the “Create Your Free Account” button to register for the course. It is critical to complete this step in order to gain access to all the videos in the series over the coming weeks.

**The Holiness of Work**

**Week 1 - God’s Plan for Work**

**TRUTH & EQUIPPING**

As you prepare to engage in this study, watch the 1-minute introductory video at the following link:

[**https://classroom.denverinstitute.org/courses/the-holiness-of-work**](https://classroom.denverinstitute.org/courses/the-holiness-of-work)

After viewing the clip, answer the following questions:

1. What does the concept of work mean to you?
2. What adjectives would you use to describe your current work (“work” being those activities, paid or unpaid, that constitute the most significant portion of your energy and time during the week)?
3. How have you personally experienced both the blessings and frustrations of work in your life?

**The Role of Work**

From the Faith & Work Classroom site, begin Lesson 1 and watch the first video, “The Role of Work.”

[**https://classroom.denverinstitute.org/courses/the-holiness-of-work/lessons/god-s-plan-for-work**](https://classroom.denverinstitute.org/courses/the-holiness-of-work/lessons/god-s-plan-for-work)

After viewing the clip, read Genesis 1:1-2:3 and then answer the following questions:

1. What is the rhythm or pattern that God establishes in this passage?
2. Now read Exodus 20:8-11. How does this passage confirm the ongoing implications of this rhythm?

Scripture establishes a pattern of work and rest as the norm for life. As beings created in the Image of God, it is embedded in our very nature to follow this pattern of work followed by restful reflection.

1. The pattern of work and rest outlined in Scripture is a lifelong pursuit, not just something that exists for a particular season of life. How does this challenge some of our culture’s perceptions about the place of work in the various seasons of life (children and teens, young adulthood, midlife, retirement, etc.)?
2. Have you taken the 6+1 pattern of work seriously in your life?

**In the Beginning**

From the Faith & Work Classroom site, continue Lesson 1 with the video and reading under the heading “In the Beginning.”

1. What do you make of Eugene Peterson’s statement that “(work) is probably our best introduction to holiness”?
2. The rhythm of creation extends beyond the 6+1-day pattern of work and rest. In various forms, the rhythm exists in all of creation. In Psalm 19:1-6, the author reflects on one of the rhythms of creation. What is that rhythm?
3. What are other rhythms of creation with which we are familiar?
4. In the video and discussion, Eugene Peterson mentions various forms of “creation work.” List below some of the forms of work that he addresses.
5. Think about your own work. How does it fit with the idea of “creation work”?
6. Are there changes in your work—or your attitude toward it—that would better reflect creation work?

**God is a Worker**

From the Faith & Work Classroom site, continue Lesson 1 with the video and reading under the heading “God is a Worker.”

Work is fundamental to the nature of God, and as beings created in His Image, our engagement in work is fundamental to living in obedience and reflecting that Image.

While it is true that work has been deeply damaged by the Fall, there are several misconceptions that have crept into our thinking about work, both from church history and from our culture.

1. What are some of the misconceptions that are discussed in the reading?
2. In Genesis 2:15, God “places” Adam in the garden to work and take care of it. What does it mean to be “placed”?
3. How does Adam’s placement in the garden allow him to express the fact that he is created in the Image of God?
4. How have you struggled to find your “place” in your work?

**Saul and Work**

From the Faith & Work Classroom site, complete the reading for the next section, “Saul and Work.”

1. As discussed in the reading, what was Saul’s fundamental problem when it came to his work? (See 1 Samuel 16:14-23.)
2. As Saul lost a Divine perspective on the role of work in his life, how did it begin to impact his view of God?
3. How have you seen this same issue in your own life?

**ACCOUNTABILITY**

1. With your group, discuss how have you viewed and approached your work up to this point in your life.
2. What are some of your chief takeaways from this first series of videos and readings?
3. Do you practice a Sabbath?
4. The title of this series is “The Holiness of Work.” From what you have studied so far, how would you say that work is “holy”? Are there things you can do to help better understand and carry out your work in such a way that it is holy?
5. In this study you will endeavor to develop an individualized understanding of work by asking a series of questions to help you identify your gifts and abilities. What are some of your strengths? Ask others in your group to help you identify ways that you can access your individual strengths.

**MISSION**

1. How can your practice of Sabbath rest give you space to consider the needs of your community and neighbors?
2. Think about ways you can encourage others in your physical workplace or vocational arena to consider how their work contributes toward human flourishing. Pursue opportunities to encourage them this week.
3. Just as He did with Adam in the Garden, God has “placed” you in your current work. What are some personal strengths that are particularly effective in your work? How can you further develop those strengths?
4. All of us as human beings can be tempted to make work an idol. Do you know friends or colleagues in your vocation who seem to find ultimate meaning in life from their work? How can you use this as an opportunity to point them to the Gospel?

**SUPPLICATION**

*Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children. Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!* (Psalm 90:16-17)

*Amen.*

**The Holiness of Work**

**Week 2 – God’s Plan for Work/Work is Good**

**TRUTH & EQUIPPING**

NOTE: If you haven’t already done so, please visit the following link:

[**https://classroom.denverinstitute.org/courses/the-holiness-of-work**](https://classroom.denverinstitute.org/courses/the-holiness-of-work).

Click the “Create Your Free Account” button to gain access to the videos and study materials for this course.

This week we will be completing “God’s Plan for Work” (Lesson 1) and starting “Work is Good” (Lesson 2).

**Kingwork**

For the conclusion of Lesson 1, click on the following link and then scroll down to read the section under the “Kingwork” heading.

[**https://classroom.denverinstitute.org/courses/the-holiness-of-work/lessons/god-s-plan-for-work**](https://classroom.denverinstitute.org/courses/the-holiness-of-work/lessons/god-s-plan-for-work)

Eugene Peterson makes the point that *kingwork* “derives from and represents the sovereign God.” In other words, true work represents some aspect of the work that God Himself does.

1. Psalm 147:13-14 lists several ways that God is making provision through the work of individuals. What are those provisions and who are the workers?

Dr. Amy L. Sherman, director of the Center on Faith in Communities, has developed several categories of work that help us see our own vocations in light of the types of work God does. These include:

* Creative Work​—“fashioning of the physical and human world” (artists, designers, architects, painters, urban planners, etc.)
* Providential Work​—“provision for and sustaining of humans and the creation” (entrepreneurs, janitors, civil servants, bankers, farmers, repairmen, etc.)
* Justice Work​—“maintenance of justice” (judges, lawyers, paralegals, diplomats, supervisors, city managers, military personnel, etc.)
* Compassionate Work—​ “comforting, healing, guiding, and shepherding” (doctors, nurses, nonprofit directors, mental health workers, social workers, stay-at-home mom or dad, EMTs, etc.)
* Revelatory Work—“work to enlighten with truth” (scientists, journalists, educators, etc.)
* Redemptive Work​—“saving and reconciling actions” (pastors, authors, counselors, stay-at-home mom or dad, songwriters, etc.)

1. Which of these six categories characterize your work?
2. How does this help you re-imagine your work as *kingwork*?

**Work is Good**

On the Faith & Work Classroom site, advance to Lesson 2, “Work is Good,” and watch the first video clip, also titled “Work is Good.”

[**https://classroom.denverinstitute.org/courses/the-holiness-of-work/lessons/work-is-good**](https://classroom.denverinstitute.org/courses/the-holiness-of-work/lessons/work-is-good)

For the remainder of this week’s study and half of next week’s, we will examine the *goodness* of work and consider how an understanding of *vocation* can help us see this goodness.

1. Do you see your work as good?
2. What aspects of your work can you appreciate and accept as gifts from God?

**Work and Spirituality**On the Faith & Work Classroom site, scroll down to the next section of Lesson 2, titled “Work and Spirituality.”

Our work is an inherently spiritual activity. It is one of the primary avenues that God uses to shape us spiritually. We are reminded of this in Paul’s closing remarks to the Thessalonian church in 1 Thessalonians 4, in which he encourages believers to walk and live in a way that is pleasing to God.

1. What are the implications of Paul’s inclusion of “work” in verse 11?
2. Eugene Peterson makes the statement, “The spiritual life begins—seriously begins—when we get a job and go to work.” How have you seen your spiritual life shaped by your work?

**ACCOUNTABILITY**

* 1. Which of Dr. Amy Sherman’s six work categories do you see reflected in your current work?
  2. Independent of your current work, which of these six types do you think more closely reflect your true nature?
  3. In this study you will endeavor to develop an individualized understanding of work by asking a series of questions to help you identify your gifts and abilities. Where do you find fulfillment, satisfaction, and joy? (Amy Sherman’s work categories may help you answer this question.)
  4. What do you most care about in the world?

**MISSION**

1. Consider your vocational area and the idea of *kingwork*. How can you love God and love your neighbor through your work?
2. Think about ways you can encourage others in your physical workplace or vocational arena to consider how their work contributes toward human flourishing. Pursue opportunities to encourage them this week.
3. God has “placed” you in your current work. How can you approach your work with satisfaction and joy?
4. All of us as human beings can be tempted to make work an idol. Do you know friends or colleagues in your vocation who seem to find ultimate meaning in life from their work? How can you use this as an opportunity to point them to the Gospel?

**SUPPLICATION**

*Almighty God, by whose will we were created, and by whose providence we have been sustained, grant to us your blessing this day. You have given to each of us our work in life; Lord, enable us to diligently perform our respective duties. May we not waste our time in unprofitableness and idleness, nor be unfaithful to any trust committed to us. By Your grace strengthen each of us for the performance of duties before us.*

*Amen.[[1]](#footnote-1)*

**The Holiness of Work**

**Week 3 – Work is Good (continued)**

**TRUTH & EQUIPPING**

NOTE: If you haven’t already done so, please visit the following link:

[**https://classroom.denverinstitute.org/courses/the-holiness-of-work**](https://classroom.denverinstitute.org/courses/the-holiness-of-work).

Click the “Create Your Free Account” button to gain access to the videos and study materials for this course.

This week we will be completing “Work is Good” (Lesson 2).

**Vocationalized**

On the Faith and Work Classroom site, go to Lesson 2 and scroll down to the video and text under the heading “Vocationalized.”

[**https://classroom.denverinstitute.org/courses/the-holiness-of-work/lessons/work-is-good**](https://classroom.denverinstitute.org/courses/the-holiness-of-work/lessons/work-is-good)

Eugene Peterson makes the point that the concept of *vocation* entails more than our current occupation. It is a unique expression of who we are and who God has created us to be as individuals.

Understanding our vocation requires a deep sense of our gifting, our nature, our passions, and our way of thinking about the world. It asks us to consider how we find satisfaction and how we prioritize spending our time and energy.

1. What “occupations” or jobs did David have during his life?

1 Samuel 17:20 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1 Samuel 18:10 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1 Samuel 18:13 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

2 Samuel 5:4 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Even with those additional occupations, David’s calling (vocation) was to be a shepherd. “*In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. And the Lord said to you, ‘You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel*’” (2 Samuel 5:2).

1. How did David approach each of his “occupations” with the vocational heart of a shepherd?

Begin to think about your vocational disposition. These are broad categories that include vocations such as:

* Teacher
* Shepherd
* Caregiver
* Engineer
* Builder
* Creator
* Artist
* Beautifier
* Protector
* Leader
* Equipper
* Provider
* Arbitrator
* Scientist
* Explorer
* Server

1. How would you describe your own vocational disposition?
2. How can you begin to “vocationalize” your work? That is, how can you begin to express your God-given vocational disposition in your current work?

**The Butcher**

On the Faith & Work Classroom site, return to Lesson 2 and scroll down to the heading titled “The Butcher.”

[**https://classroom.denverinstitute.org/courses/the-holiness-of-work/lessons/work-is-good**](https://classroom.denverinstitute.org/courses/the-holiness-of-work/lessons/work-is-good)

1. *“There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?* (Ecclesiastes 2:24-25). Take a few minutes to consider the implications of this passage for your own work.
2. Eugene Peterson discusses how his father took pride and found dignity in his work as a butcher. How did his father’s attitude contrast with the way those around him did their work?
3. How can you take pride and find dignity in your work?
4. We normally associate “calling” with work in the church or world missions. But Pastor Tim Keller has noted that in 1 Corinthians 7:17, the idea of ‘calling” or “assignment” refers to work outside the church. Have you ever considered your work outside the church as a calling from God?
5. Just as God calls and places individuals in church roles to serve Him and love their neighbors, He also calls individuals to non-church work for the same purpose: to serve Him and love their neighbors! How does this understanding of your work potentially change your view of it?

**Discovering Vocation**

On the Faith & Work Classroom site, return to Lesson 2 and scroll to the section titled “Discovering Vocation.” Watch the video and read the text.

[**https://classroom.denverinstitute.org/courses/the-holiness-of-work/lessons/work-is-good**](https://classroom.denverinstitute.org/courses/the-holiness-of-work/lessons/work-is-good)

1. How much thought have you given to the idea of a *vocational calling* as opposed to *occupation*?

Exploring vocational calling is more than simply asking, “What does God want me to do?” Calling involves living out, in every area of life, the purposes of God as the person He has created us to be. It includes gifting, joy, fulfillment, and passion. In Romans 1:6, Paul reminds us that our primary calling is first to faith and union with Christ.

With this in mind, *flourishing* in our work involves three things: 1) our primary calling as ambassadors of Christ; 2) our vocational disposition and equipping (gifts, interests, passions); and 3) our God-given placement in an actual work location.

This does not always mean that we will find ourselves in the “perfect job.” In fact, more often than not we will experience disappointments and frustrations in our current work. Even so, understanding the concept of *vocation* helps us think about our work in fresh new ways.

**ACCOUNTABILITY**

In this lesson, we have reflected on vocation, calling, and placement. Think about your current work situation and then answer the following:

1. How can you better fulfill your primary calling as an ambassador for Jesus Christ?
2. How can you live out your vocational disposition and equipping?
3. How can you begin to see your current work as a God-given placement?

**MISSION**

1. Considering your vocational area and the concept of *kingwork* (the work of God as represented in your own work), how can you love God and love your neighbor through your work?
2. Think about ways you can encourage others in your physical workplace or vocational arena to consider how their work contributes toward human flourishing. Pursue opportunities to encourage them this week.
3. God has “placed” you in your current work. How can you approach your work with satisfaction and joy?
4. All of us as human beings can be tempted to make work an idol. Do you know friends or colleagues in your vocation who seem to find ultimate meaning in life from their work? How can you use this as an opportunity to point them to the Gospel?

**SUPPLICATION**

*Heavenly Father, I thank you for uniquely creating me and gifting me. Holy Spirit, guide and empower me in my vocational pursuits. Grant that I might have contentment to be fully present in the workplace you have called me to be at this time. Lead me with your wisdom, and give me the courage to make the necessary changes that I might more fully embrace my vocational calling. In Jesus’s name I pray.*

*Amen*.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**The Holiness of Work**

**Week 4 – Busyness and Sabbath**

**TRUTH & EQUIPPING**

NOTE: If you haven’t already done so, please visit the following link:

[**https://classroom.denverinstitute.org/courses/the-holiness-of-work**](https://classroom.denverinstitute.org/courses/the-holiness-of-work).

Click the “Create Your Free Account” button to gain access to the videos and study materials for this course.

This week we will conclude our study by covering “Busyness and Sabbath” (Lesson 3).

**Busyness and Sabbath**

On the Faith & Work Classroom site, navigate to Lesson 3 to watch the video clips and read the text under the headings “Why So Busy?”, “Sabbath,” “Practicing Sabbath,” “Holiness of Work,” and “Closing Prayer.” (It will take you roughly 25 minutes to complete this section.)

[**https://classroom.denverinstitute.org/courses/the-holiness-of-work/lessons/busyness-and-sabbath**](https://classroom.denverinstitute.org/courses/the-holiness-of-work/lessons/busyness-and-sabbath)

Eugene Peterson says that busyness may be “the most vocation-destroying condition that there is” and that technology trains us to believe we can do more than we can actually do. Internal and external pressures compel us to be busy all the time! To combat this, we must intentionally choose a non-busy life. Take a few minutes to consider what this might look like for you.

1. Why are we so busy?
2. Why do we and those around us jam-pack our schedules?
3. What do you think we are trying to derive from our busyness?
4. What are the benefits of having a non-busy life?

In Genesis 1:31 we read, “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.” After thoughtful reflection on the creative work He had completed, God pronounced it “very good.” This thoughtful consideration of His work carries over into His seventh day of rest.

These two elements constitute the practice of the Sabbath: 1) rest from our regular work; and 2) thoughtful reflection on that work. God gave us the Sabbath as a gift and a pattern. When we embrace this model of work followed by rest and reflection, we are mirroring the Image of God.

1. How does the practice of Sabbath help us to appreciate the intrinsic value of the gift of work?
2. How does this practice of Sabbath reflect the Image of God and honor Him?
3. Do you feel guilty or have a hard time stepping back from busyness to rest?
4. If you don’t do so already, what would it take for you to begin practicing Sabbath?
5. What activities do you find restful?

**The Holiness of Work**

As we conclude this 4-week study, let’s review and summarize some of the main points about the holiness of work. Look up the following Scripture verses and fill in the blanks:

Genesis 1:1 God is a: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Genesis 2:15 Work is: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Eccl. 2:10, 24-25 Work can be: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

2 Corinthians 10:13 Work is a: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Genesis 2:1-3 Sabbath is: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**ACCOUNTABILITY**

After four weeks of studying the holiness of work, answer the following questions:

1. How do you view the Sabbath now?
2. How does this change your view of your faith?
3. How does it change your view of your work?

**MISSION**

1. Review your answers to the “Mission” questions from the previous three weeks. As you begin to put some of the principles from this study into practice, what messages are you sending to those around you who observe your life?
2. Are there specific ways that your understanding of work and Sabbath can be employed to love your neighbor (friends, colleagues, family members) and ultimately point them to Christ?

**SUPPLICATION**

*Creator God,*

*You know us more deeply than we could ever imagine or comprehend. You who spoke the stars, the birds, the trees, the mountains, and rivers into being. You crafted us each uniquely for co-laboring in this good and beautiful creation. We thank you.*

*You who formed the world with speech and hands, and on day seven took rest and enjoyed with delight, teach us how to honor our time and place well. Grant that we may gladly set aside one day each week to follow the pattern you set for us. Revive and nourish us in our work and our rest—may we ever receive both as gifts.*

*Intimate, all-knowing One, you knitted us each as individuals with talents and gifts. Thank you. Help us to ever-deepen our grasp of that for which you have made us.*

*Most merciful God, grant us the grace to work with excellence, love, and gratitude no matter the circumstances. Remind us daily of the truth that Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again. May this instill in us an unshakeable hope, and may it shape the way we engage our work each and every day.*

*All glory and honor be unto you: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

*Amen.*

1. Henry Thorton, *Devotional Prayers*, ed. James S. Bell Jr., (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1993), 19, 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Tom Nelson, *Work Matters*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)