



# GOOD JOB

YOUR WORK MATTERS

Most of our life happens outside of church, and for many of us that means it happens at work. Some have careers in the workforce, others have work to do at home with family or volunteering in retirement. Your work matters to God. Your job can be glorious if you glorify God in your job.

## GOOD JOB • Titus 2:1–14 • Tim McConnell • February 2, 2020

I loved playing in the sandbox as a kid. I used to build pyramids, ziggurats actually, with those layers and levels. I carefully squared off the corners and painstakingly centered each next level on the last, until at the top I would pinch together a tiny square top, sometimes just a few grains of sand. Then I would sit back and enjoy it. Perfect! Just in time for some kid to run along and stomp on it. It was too tempting! Work can be frustrating. But there it is. We were made to make something of the world. We were made to work. In our *Good Job* series, we have seen that God made us to work and set us in the world with what is called the “cultural mandate,” in Genesis 1:28: “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.’” All we do under the category of life we call “work” is in some way or other derived from this God-ordained role for us in the world. We were made to work. But under the curse of the Fall, work is difficult and frustrating. The mission of Jesus is to redeem the fallen world, fix what was broken and heal what is wounded. Work too can be redeemed in Christ. Your job can be glorious when you glorify God in your job. Today we talk about the actual workplace. Good job at work.

This is a challenging passage. “All Scripture is,” as 2 Timothy 3:16 says, “God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,” but some Scriptures are more open to misinterpretation than others. That’s why we strive to “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Sometimes I worry that Christians in our era choose churches and pastors based more on charisma or a compelling personality with a compelling story than on their ability to handle the word of truth. The primary office of the pastor is to preach with depth of understanding and wisdom, mining the Scriptures for their treasures. Whenever you move on from here, if you do, choose wise instruction over the showiness. This passage has been misused to support both slavery and sexism. Let’s clear off the mud so we can extract the jewel of truth.

First, sexism. I’m sure you heard it as I read it, “Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God” (Titus 2:4-5). This has been used at times to say a woman’s place is in the home. But Proverbs 31 presents the ideal, godly woman as one who is active in the marketplace along with being attentive to her family. It helps to remember that the separation of public and private spheres, and the application of gender roles to them, is a modern phe-

nomenon. Home and work were much more intertwined in the ancient world. Don’t imagine men commuting off to work here in Crete, leaving the wife in her apron to run the home until he returned. That’s a product of the Industrial Age, and it has done damage both ways. Women were kept from healthy influence on the public square and men abdicated authority at home. In the world of the New Testament, the household was where most work happened. We saw in chapter one how both men and women are called to be attentive to home. The full witness of the Bible charges both sexes to be attentive to home and work.

What is this passage telling us? Women, pay attention to your role at home with children. Be respectful and selfless toward your husband; just as, elsewhere, husbands are told to be selfless and sacrificially loving toward their wives. In all of this, it says, keep in mind that people are watching how Christian women and men are treating one another, and if we blow this, it may cause outsiders to “malign the word of God.” Well, nothing maligns the message of Jesus today quite like a male Christian leader taking a passage like this and declaring that the Bible dictates a woman’s place is in the home. This still happens. It is horribly damaging to the witness we have.

Similarly, verses 9–10 force us to ask, does the Bible endorse slavery? No. Not as you think of it. When we think of slavery, we think immediately of the horror of the chattel slave trade of our own history. Those memories linger still, as we enter Black History Month. The Bible is different. The Bible allows for periods of work to be bought and sold, but not people. Slavery in the Bible is more like indentured servitude, and it acted as a social safety net in its time. The work was lowly and often unpaid, but did gain the worker lodging, food and care for themselves and their families. Slaves had rights and they were never to be mistreated or abused. They bore the image of God and were not to be used or regarded like animals. They were supposed to participate in Sabbath rest, festivals, seventh-year sabbaticals and Jubilee freedom, and to always have their liberation date known before them. Was that abused? Sure. But the Bible does not advocate for abuse or the kind of slavery we imagine. So, look at this passage again. Maybe you have resisted Christianity, believing the Bible speaks against women and advocates for slavery. These verses can be turned upside down and they can cause great damage. Turn them right side up again and they give life. Look again. This passage, it assumes that women were there in the church. It assumes that slaves were a part of Titus’ church in Crete. They are regarded as people with a particular role to play. God has a purpose for them and a meaning to their work. The way they go about their work, if they do it unto the Lord, “will

make the teaching about God our Savior attractive” (Titus 2:10). Find another ancient text that regards the work of slaves as eternally meaningful and purposeful and I’ll eat my hat.

So, this gets us back on track a little now, but do you see what this is actually saying? This is saying that the way you do your work, even if you are a slave, whether your work is highly regarded and technical and high-paying, or it is menial and task-oriented and unpaid, your work means something. The way you do your work means something. Your work matters to God. Your job can be glorious if you glorify God in your job. Friends, as we come up to the surface again, if that’s true of a first-century slave on the island of Crete, I don’t care how much you hate your boss or think your job is small—your work matters too.

The average employee who works until the age of 65 will spend over 88,000 hours at work. Gallup employee engagement surveys continually report that two-thirds of the workforce are disengaged with their jobs. Translation? Most people hate their jobs! How should we look at work differently? Titus 2 says, Hey, you older ones teach the younger ones. That’s a gift the church can give. Imagine being able to speak to your 25-year old self back at the beginning of your career. God intends to do that, in a way, through church. The Fellows Program is exactly this kind of thing. If you are tuning out because you are in the retirement stage, listen up! Have you reflected on the meaning of your work? Could you distill some of what you learned? Elders teach the youngers. People are watching and the message of Jesus is on trial, Christianity itself is on display, so, “In everything set them an example by doing what is good” (Titus 2:7). That’s what all these categories are about in Titus. Old men, young men, old women, young women, slaves and free and teachers and all. You are on display, and the way you do your work, the way you do what you do will bear witness to who you are.

Is there a way to hear “Good Job” at work? To have peace in our positions and joy in our jobs? We get stuck thinking either too much or too little of our work. We either wrap our whole identity in it and work ourselves to death trying to justify our existence through our work, or we give up and go disengaged, working for the weekend. The Gospel frees us from both errors. I want to give you five questions to ask at work. Here are five questions to ask yourself, to help you apply the Gospel to your job. (1) How can my work serve others? Take it straight from secular workplace surveys, job satisfaction goes up when employees see their work tied to a greater purpose and greater service to humanity. This is what we see right here in Titus. If a slave can go into their day, trying to do their best to do their work in a way that reflects Jesus, and

“will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive,” how much more can you, in whatever role you are in at work, find meaning and purpose in how your work impacts others. Next week, Yemi Mobolade will share about the city, the common good, and how what each of us does impacts others around us. How does your work serve those around you?

(2) How does my work make something of the world? How is the job I’m doing part of the cultural mandate God has given us to take the material world, add our intelligence and creativity, and make it more than it was when we began? Look at all the ways people are encouraged to get at it in this passage, how they are to conduct themselves. To be worthy of respect (v. 2), inviting honor by their personal dignity, self-controlled, possessing self-mastery and peace in their own skin, sound in faith, love and endurance, persevering through hardship. Be reverent (v. 3), teaching what is good, busy at home (get at it!), kind and respectful; doing what is good (v. 6), demonstrating integrity (a whole-self life, a life integrated), trustworthiness (v. 10). Why? Because as you work, the way you work bears witness to the Savior, verse 13: “while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good” (Titus 2:13–14). A people eager to do what is good. What I’m saying is that diligence, perseverance, hard work and an eagerness to do it, these things matter and help lift your job out of the sludge of mindless labor when you see what your work makes of the world.

(3) How can I do my work God’s way? In every job, in every walk of life listed here in Scripture, in every single job there is, you will be tempted to do it the world’s way. Can you do it God’s way? As Christians, we will often carry a different ethic to our work than those around us. I once knew a man who took a job out of law school with a firm in New York City focusing on trust law, wills and estates. He came across a pile of trusts that were not being disbursed and closed out. The money was sitting there. Though the wills said to spend it, it wasn’t going anywhere, and the firm was profiting from keeping the money in its investment account. His conscience was disturbed. But he was a first-year flunky and couldn’t rock the boat. It took him years to bring it up, but finally there was an opportunity and the partners said, basically, “Yeah, that just sits there. We don’t have time to figure out the original intent and find ways to disburse it, and there are no family members pushing it, so that stuff just piles up. If you want to do something with it, go ahead.” All of a sudden, he found himself personally in charge of disbursing millions of dollars of funds, most of it intended

for Christian causes. When your conscience is pricked, pay attention. You never know what is on the other side of following the conviction of the Holy Spirit to do something according to God's ways, not the world's ways.

(4) How is my work forming me? How is God using the work you are in to form and shape you, to teach you things, to make you more like Jesus? We will have to come back to that, but every job, every bit of work is formative, shaping. One way to bring God into your work is to ask that question. What is God teaching me through this? God cares less how much you make at work and more how much your work makes you. Finally, (5) How can I glorify God in my work? How can you glorify God in it? Your job can be glorious when you glorify God in your job. As it says over in Colossians, in another encouragement to slaves for the meaningfulness of their work: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Colossians 3:23–24). He is worth serving.

The Gospel frees you to work. You don't have to work to find affirmation or justification; you have been affirmed, you have been justified by Jesus Christ who died to make you whole and win your adoption into the family of God. You don't have to escape work as a meaningless burden; you can work with zeal and energy and passion, because you are working for Jesus. And Jesus is worthy of zeal. Jesus is worthy of passion. Jesus is worthy of glory as you give yourself away day by day to Him in your work. He is worthy of all of it—because He is the one who labored to give Himself away for us. "For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:11–13). Jesus is the only boss who redeems us as we do our labor for Him.

No work is perfect, no job is without frustrations. But we are glorifying God in our work, and He makes it glorious. I leave you again with this benediction from Dick Halverson: "You go nowhere by accident. Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God has put you there. God has a purpose in your being there. Christ lives in you and has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in the grace and love and power of Jesus Christ." Amen.

## STUDY GUIDE

### GOOD JOB • "At Work"

#### Titus 2:1–14

#### **UP:** UP: Connect with God through Spending Time in His Word

Read aloud the passage for the week: Titus 2:1–14.

- 1) As you think through Paul's instructions about an ideal Christian community in verses 1–10, what sticks out to you? Is there anything that surprises you here?
- 2) When have you experienced this sort of community?
- 3) Reread verses 9–10. Paul is not affirming the type of slavery that we usually think of today. At the time, this was a common cultural practice that was akin to indentured servitude. How might these instructions apply to an employee in a modern work environment?
- 4) Reread verses 11–14. Paul describes the way in which Christians can live upright and godly lives here and now, and that Christians are to be eager to do what is good. Why are our actions, words and attitudes so important? How can we be more deliberate witnesses?
- 5) Read Colossians 3:23–24. How might these verses influence or impact the way you view your workplace or your daily tasks?
- 6) How might these passages challenge you to reconsider how your work and faith interact?

#### **OUT:** Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)

One reason Paul gives so many instructions to the church about their behavior was because he wanted their lives to inspire others to become curious about Christ. Who in your life is likely to express curiosity in Christ because of the way you speak and act?

#### **IN:** Connect with Each Other

Take a moment to name your primary "workplace." Close your time by praying for that place. Pray that God would be glorified in that space because of your actions and attitudes.