

GOSPEL SHAPED

WORK

Handbook

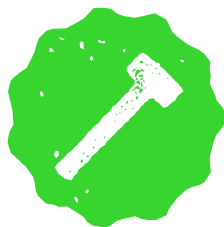




GOSPEL SHAPED

WORK

Tom Nelson



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COALITION

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Gospel Shaped Work Handbook

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PREFACE

GROWING A GOSPEL SHAPED CHURCH

The Gospel Coalition is a group of pastors and churches in the Reformed heritage who delight in the truth and power of the gospel, and who want the gospel of Christ crucified and resurrected to lie at the center of all we cherish, preach and teach.

We want churches called into existence by the gospel to be shaped by the gospel in their everyday life.

Through our fellowship, conferences, and online and printed media, we have sought to encourage pastors and church leaders to calibrate their lives around what is of first importance—the gospel of Christ. In these resources, we want to provide those same pastors with the tools to excite and equip church members with this mindset.

In our foundation documents, we identified five areas that should mark the lives of believers in a local fellowship:

1. Empowered corporate worship
2. Evangelistic effectiveness
3. Counter-cultural community
4. The integration of faith and work
5. The doing of justice and mercy

We believe that a church utterly committed to winsome and theologically substantial expository preaching, and that lives out the gospel in these areas, will display its commitment to dynamic evangelism, apologetics, and church planting. These gospel-shaped churches will emphasize repentance, personal renewal, holiness, and the wonderful life of the church as the body of Christ. At the same time, there will be engagement with the social structures of ordinary people, and cultural engagement with art, business, scholarship and government. The church will be characterized by firm devotion to the truth on the one hand, and by transparent compassion on the other.

The Gospel Coalition believes in the priority of the local church, and that the local church is the best place to discuss these five ministry drivers and decide how to integrate them into life and mission. So, while being clear on the biblical principles, these resources give space to consider what a genuine expression of a gospel-shaped

church looks like for you in the place where God has put you, and with the people he has gathered into fellowship with you.

Through formal teaching sessions, daily Bible devotionals, group Bible studies and the regular preaching ministry, it is our hope and prayer that congregations will grow into maturity, and so honor and glorify our great God and Savior.



Don Carson
President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Don Carson".



Tim Keller
Vice President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Timothy J. Keller".



INTRODUCTION

As gospel-loving people, we say that the gospel influences every dimension of our lives; yet many of us struggle with living out a gospel-shaped faith, particularly when it comes to our work. It is easy and convenient to compartmentalize our lives, worshiping one way on Sunday and working in quite another way on Monday. Are your Sunday faith and your Monday work seemingly worlds apart? Is your Christian faith speaking into what you do in the majority of your life? Are you experiencing a sizeable Sunday to Monday gap? I have good news. God's design and desire for you is to embrace a gospel-shaped faith that closes the gap between your Sunday worship and your Monday work.

The Gospel Coalition is addressing the importance of narrowing the all too common Sunday to Monday gap in their Theological Vision for Ministry, entitled, *The Integration of Faith and Work*:

Christians glorify God not only through the ministry of the Word, but also through their vocations of agriculture, art, business, government, scholarship—all for God's glory and the furtherance of the public good. Too many Christians have learned to seal off their faith-beliefs from the way they work in their vocation. The gospel is seen as a means of finding individual peace and not as the foundation of a worldview—a comprehensive interpretation of reality affecting all that we do. But we have a vision for a church that equips its people to think out the implications of the gospel on how we do carpentry, plumbing, data-entry, nursing, art, business, government, journalism, entertainment, and scholarship. Such a church will not only support Christians' engagement with culture, but will also help them work with distinctiveness, excellence, and accountability in their trades and professions...¹

In this curricular journey of exploration, we will address both theologically and practically the Sunday to Monday gap. We desire to guide you to greater understanding of how a more integral Christian faith shapes you as a worker, informs the work you do and influences the workplace you inhabit. In each session you will encounter life-changing truths flowing from Holy Scripture regarding the paid or unpaid work you are called to do throughout the week. You will become aware in fresh and transforming ways of how you have been created

¹ You can read the full text of the statement on page 176 of this Handbook.

and redeemed with work in mind. Your mind will be challenged and your heart encouraged with a hopeful realism, remembering that the work you do now in this time of redemptive history is both energizing and agonizing, both fulfilling and frustrating. You can anticipate a renewed sense of joy from knowing more fully the biblical truth that one day yet future, you will work without the thorns and thistles that are now an inescapable part of the brokenness of all work. In the mysterious providence of God, you will discover it is in and through the joys and pains of your work that you are called to worship God, be spiritually formed, love your neighbors, live out the gospel and proclaim the gospel to others.

It is my heartfelt and hopeful prayer that as you work through this curriculum, you will increasingly realize how much the gospel speaks into the work you are called to do each and every day. May you gain a greater glimpse of how very much your work matters to God and to others, and may the inspired words of the apostle Paul grace your journey of discovery! "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ" (Colossians 3:23-24).



Tom Nelson



HOW TO USE GOSPEL SHAPED WORK



MAIN TEACHING SESSION This session combines watching short talks on a DVD or listening to “live” talks with times for discussion. These prompt you to think about what you have heard and how it might apply to your church and cultural context. Bear in mind that there is not necessarily a “right answer” to every question!



DEVOTIONALS Each session comes with six daily personal devotionals. These look at passages that are linked to the theme of the Main Teaching Session, and are for you to read and meditate on at home through the week after the session. You may like to do them in addition to or instead of your usual daily devotionals, or use them to begin such a practice.



JOURNAL As you reflect on what you have learned as a group and in your personal devotionals, use this page to record the main truths that have struck you, things you need to pray about, and issues you’d like to discuss further or questions you’d like to ask.



BIBLE STUDY As part of this curriculum, your church may be running weekly Bible Studies as well as the Main Teaching Sessions. These look more closely at a passage and help you focus on an aspect of the Main Teaching Session. If your church is not using this part of the curriculum, you could work through it on your own or with another church member.



SERMON NOTES Your church’s preaching program may be following this curriculum; space has been provided for you to make notes on these sermons in your Handbook.



SESSION 1:

CREATED TO WORK

WHY ARE WE HERE? THAT IS OFTEN A SURPRISINGLY DIFFICULT QUESTION TO ANSWER – AND NOT MANY OF US WOULD INCLUDE THE WORD “WORK” IN OUR RESPONSE. IN THIS SESSION, WE’LL DISCOVER THAT ONE OF THE PURPOSES FOR WHICH WE WERE CREATED IS, IN FACT, TO WORK – AND WHY THAT IS SUCH WONDERFUL NEWS.



Discuss



READ GENESIS 1:26 - 2:3

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." ²⁹ And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. ³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

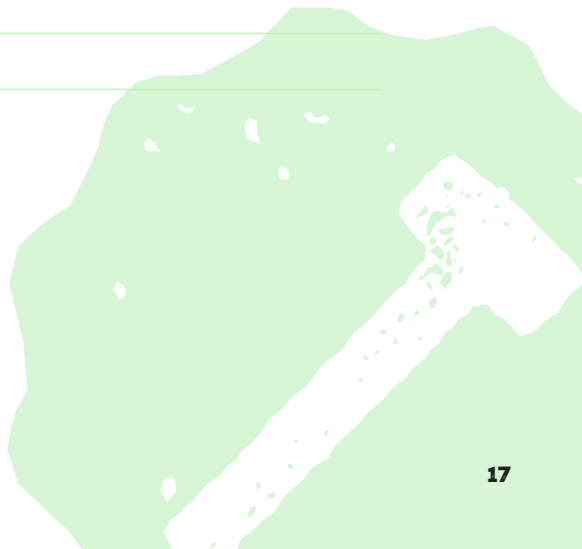
2 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

In Genesis 1:28, God tells the first people how they are to live. What are the five commands he gives them, and what do they mean?

How does this help to answer our opening question: "Why are we here?"

Genesis 2:3 tells us that God is a worker. We can also discern one of the reasons why he works—he loves his creation and wants to bless it. He created us in his image (Genesis 1:27), so *all* humans—as his image bearers—are created to be workers too. Does the idea that you were made to be a worker surprise you? What difference might this truth make on your journey to work, or as you start your day?

 **WATCH DVD 1.2 OR LISTEN TO TALK 1.2**



Discuss

In this curriculum, we will see that work is more than just what we do each day, or how we pay our way. Work is creation, collaboration and cultivation—whatever our daily occupation, paid or not.

Look at your work (paid or otherwise) through the lens of “work as creation.” How does your specific work help to build, create, strengthen or expand human society?

Work is primarily cultivation—contributing something to the world. But it is also collaboration in two ways: collaboration with God, and collaboration with each other. Can you see how the work you do (paid or otherwise) is collaboration in one or both of these ways?

Work as cultivation means that we are to grow and steward the raw materials of creation. How does your work take the “raw materials” of God’s creation to enhance the lives of others?

 WATCH DVD 1.3 OR LISTEN TO TALK 1.3

Discuss

"There is no such thing as menial labor." How does this change the way you think about dull tasks you undertake during the day, and/or about people who do the kinds of jobs your society considers "menial"?

As we think about work over the next few weeks, what questions about work are you hoping will be answered?

Pray

Genesis 1 says that we are created to work and that work is fundamentally good.

Pray that during the course of this curriculum, God will show you any attitudes to work that need to change.

Pray that you will grow as godly workers, who are images of God to the world around you.



DAILY BIBLE DEVOTIONALS

These six devotionals focus on Psalm 8, a hymn of praise enjoying the truths of Genesis 1 – 2. We see who God is and who we are—and whose we are, and why we are here.

Day 1

PSALM 8:1

Q: *What is the whole earth intended to show us?*

Q: *What are all the “heavens” above us intended to show us?*

Every single aspect of the creation points to its Creator. A snowflake’s intricacy... a lightning bolt’s power... a cell’s complexity... a sunset’s beauty. Each tells us there is a Maker, and each tells us something of the Maker. We see his glory reflected in each part of his work that we see around us. And, just as walking through a medieval monarch’s palace was intended to drive you to your knees by the time you reached his throneroom, so creation is designed to cause us to worship the Lord in awe, as heaven does: **read Revelation 4:11**.

As we look up at our Majesty from our knees, we are in the right—the only—position to appreciate that God is not only *the* Lord, but *our* Lord. He is the God of all things, who reveals himself personally to his people. Wherever you go today, at work and at rest, in the good and the hard, remember: *I know the God who runs this place*.

PRAY: *O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

Day 2

PSALM 8:2

After the awe of v 1, this verse seems strange.

Q: *Does all of God’s creation recognize that he is its rightful King?*

Q: *Where has God “established [his] strength”? Why is this a strange way to counter his “foes”?*

The truth written in poetry here was seen in history later when the One who molded the planets walked on earth—**read Matthew 21:12-17**. It was not the powerful who proclaimed the truth about the Son of God—God had “hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children” (Matthew 11:25). This points to a profound truth about the world’s Maker: *The all-present, all-powerful One chooses to work through those who are small and weak*.

If you are feeling strong today, take care that you do not rely on yourself and oppose your Creator. If you know you are weak, take heart that you are just the kind of person through whom God displays his strength and achieves his purposes. **Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10**.

PRAY: *Creator God, I am a frail creature. Let me see my weaknesses not as a disaster, but as an opportunity to showcase your glory.*

Day 3

PSALM 8:3-4

Q: *As we look into the sky on a clear night, what is one thing we should ask? How should we feel?*

Considering creation should not only cause us to magnify our view of the Creator, but prompt us to diminish our sense of ourselves. Look at another planet in our solar system—unreachable for mankind, yet just one of roughly 1 million billion billion planets crafted by God with a word. You and I really are small—tiny specks on a small rock in a far-flung corner of the universe.

Q: *How does considering creation—and both the One who made it and we who live in it—show us how ridiculous it is to:*

- *disobey God's commands?*
- *doubt God's power?*
- *deny God's authority over us?*

All of us have a god-complex—we tend to think we should call the shots in our lives, and that God should mold himself to fit our priorities and practices. Looking at creation is one way of helping ourselves to wrestle the crown off our own heads, so that we might gaze in wonder and gasp in awe: “How majestic is your name in all the earth” (v 1, 9).

Q: *When do you find it hardest to remember that God is God, and that you are not? How would remembering how many planets he has made, and how many you have made, help you?*

PRAY: *Creator God, help me to know my smallness, that I would magnify your greatness.*

Day 4

Only if we ask the question of verse 4 are we ready to appreciate the truth of verse 5...

PSALM 8:5

Q: *What position did God give humanity?*

Q: *Given who God is, and who we are, why is this an awesome truth?*

Yes, we are very, very small. But we are not inconsequential—not an afterthought in the great creating works of God. Quite the reverse: we were the pinnacle, given “glory and honor” as he made our first ancestors in his image (Genesis 1:26-28), able to relate to him and able to reflect him.

We are not mere specks, because we are cared-for creatures, given the privileged position of knowing God. The tragedy is that, because we do not like to be dependent upon or subject to anyone, we tend to reject our created-ness. And that relegates us to mere matter, which does not matter much. The paradoxical truth is that it is only as we embrace our smallness that we can glimpse our greatness—a greatness that comes not from being independent self-rulers, but from being dependent creatures made by God and fashioned in his image.

Q: *How do verse 4 and verse 5 help you see yourself neither too highly, nor too lowly?*

Q: *How might v 4-5 be a helpful way into talking to a skeptic about the gospel?*

PRAY: *Lord, enable me to live with a sense of humility because I am a creature; and of dignity because I am made in your image.*

Day 5**PSALM 8:6-9**

Verse 5 showed us that as humans we have a God-given dignity...

- Q:** What does verse 6 say God has given us?
- Q:** How should this verse affect the way we view our work, whether it is in the home, the factory, the field or the office?

Don't miss how astonishing it is that God made us not only to relate to him and reflect him, but to *rule* under him. He invites us to share in his plans for his world, so that we might stand with him in eternity and say not only, "He did that" but, "We did that."

- Q:** How does remembering that we rule over the works of God's hands, and not ours, affect how we use the power we have?

Things go wrong with our work in the world when we forget one of two things. First, that in some smaller or larger way, each of us has been given *dominion*—what we do matters, and our work can (and should) make a difference. Second, that we have been *given* dominion—it is delegated by God, and we are accountable to God. Our dominion must never be exercised in a way that seeks to defy his purposes, or to trample on his commands.

- Q:** How do verses 6-8 help you to go to work (or stay home to work) with purpose and joy today?

PRAY: Lord, thank you for calling me to contribute to the furthering of your plans. Help me to connect my daily work to your purposes in this world.

Day 6

Psalm 8 tells us so much about ourselves—and yet it is not really about us at all...

HEBREWS 2:5-10

- Q:** Having quoted Psalm 8, what does this writer to first-century Christians remind them that God did (middle of v 8)?
- Q:** But what do we not see (end of v 8)?

We love to have dominion... but we want it independently, for we do not love to have dominion under God, used in line with his commands. In trying to rule without God, we forfeit the ability to rule the world under God. There is a great mismatch between what Psalm 8 says about the earth, and what we see on the earth. We do not relate to God rightly, reflect God clearly, or rule under God properly.

- Q:** But what do we "see" (v 9)?

There is a perfect human, who came from heaven and was made lower than the angels, who exercised his dominion humbly and perfectly, and who died for his people to restore their relationship to God. We see this man—"namely Jesus" (v 9)—crowned with glory and honor. Jesus will rule "the world to come" (v 5), and so we look forward to him restoring us, as "sons" of God (v 10), to be the people we were created to be, working and ruling alongside him in his recreated world.

- Q:** Re-read Psalm 8 as a song about Jesus. How does this increase your praise of our Lord, "majestic ... in all the earth"?

PRAY: Memorize Psalm 8. Meditate on it. Pray you would live, and work, in light of it.



JOURNAL

What I've learned or been particularly struck by this week...

What I want to change in my perspectives or actions as a result of this week...

Things I would like to think about more or discuss with others at my church...



BIBLE STUDY

Discuss

When the subject of work comes up in conversation, what kinds of attitudes do people show toward work? Is that range of attitudes the same when you discuss work at church with other Christians?

This first session of *Gospel Shaped Work* has shown us some big ideas that may be unfamiliar to people.

- How does the Bible first reveal God? As a worker who loves his job!
- Why are we here? God created us to work!
- What is God's "Creation Mandate" for the world? For humans made in God's image to fill the earth and subdue it.
- How are we to fulfill that command? By creating, co-operating and cultivation.

Let's understand these fundamental truths more deeply as we look again at Genesis 1.



READ GENESIS 1:1-25

²⁰ And God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens." ²¹ So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

1. After God made the heavens and the earth (v 1), what was the earth like (v 2)?

2. From verse 3 onwards we see God at work. What do we learn about the kind of worker God is from these verses?

3. If you look at creation, what does it tell us about our Creator (see also Romans 1 v 19-20)?



READ GENESIS 1:26-31

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

4. We are "made in the image of God" (v 27)—who is revealed as a worker in Genesis 1. Go through each of your answers to question 2—which of these aspects of God's character do you see in your own work? Which are you best at? Where might you need to develop?

5. What are the five commands God gives to the whole of humankind in verse 28? How can we see the human race fulfill these commands in general? How can you see aspects of them in the work that you do?

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6. How should these truths about our nature and position as people in God's world affect the way we view ourselves? How might it change the way we see others?

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7. Think about how you feel as you start work on a Monday morning. Think about common attitudes to work among your friends and colleagues. How might the perspective of Genesis 1 change our view of work—whatever that might be?

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8. Think of some practical ways we can honor those who work around us—especially those whose work is often considered routine or "low grade."

Apply

FOR YOURSELF: Do you need to change your fundamental attitude toward work? Have you been guilty of a downbeat attitude toward it that does not honor God? How will you help yourself to think differently about work this week?



FOR YOUR CHURCH: Is talking about work subtly looked down on in your church, as if it is not a fit subject for conversation? How often is work referred to in a positive and constructive way in sermons, Bible studies and other church meetings? How might you cultivate a more positive way to discuss work, and work-related matters in the life of your church?

Pray

FOR YOUR GROUP: Discover what each member of your group actually does work wise. Today, try not to focus on particular problems or difficulties—we will get to that next time!. Instead, give thanks for the work, and the way it contributes to God's creation commands.

FOR YOUR CHURCH: As your church embarks on this series examining what it means to let the gospel shape the way we think about work, pray that you would grow together in seeing more clearly the Lord Jesus Christ, and his perfect work in saving us.

