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The Gospel at Work

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FOREWORD
BY DAVID PLATT

If the people I pastor work forty hours a week for forty years of their lives, that means they will put in more than eighty thousand hours at a job during their lifetime. These hours don't even include the thousands they spend in school preparing for work, on top of thousands more they spend in cars, planes, and trains traveling to work. Consequently, one of our greatest needs in the church is an understanding of how daily work according to God's Word ties in with God's ultimate purpose in the world.

We in the church desperately need to see how God himself delights in work and God himself designed our work by his grace for our good and for his glory. At the same time, we need to see how work, as a mark of human dignity, has been marred by human depravity. Work that was designed to be fulfilling is frustrating; work that was designed to be purposeful feels pointless; and work that was designed to be selfless has become selfish. As a result, we find ourselves on one hand overvaluing work to the neglect of our health, our families, and the church, or on the other hand undervaluing work in a culture that fosters the unbiblical ideal of laziness and glorifies the unbiblical idea of retirement.

But there is another way—a better way—to work, a way that is made possible by the work of Christ on the cross. In the gospel, Christ himself has secured salvation from our sin, satisfaction for our souls, and significance in our work in such a way that we are now free to worship God wholeheartedly as we work, to love others selflessly in our work, and to trust God completely with our work. The gospel brings significant meaning to the seemingly mundane and provides a supreme purpose for every employee and employer on the planet.

For this reason, I am delighted, ecstatic, and overjoyed (and I could go on with more descriptors!) to commend this book to you. As soon as I finished reading *The Gospel at Work* by Sebastian Traeger and Greg Gilbert, my first thought was, “I wish that every single member of the church would read this book.” For here a leader in the marketplace and a pastor in the church wonderfully blend biblical foundations with practical implications that I am hopeful, when understood and applied, will mobilize men and women who are working hard at whatever they do for the adornment of the gospel and working strategically wherever God leads for the advancement of the gospel, all to the furtherance of God’s fame in the mission field known as the marketplace.

David Platt, Birmingham, Alabama

INTRODUCTION

THE CHALLENGE

If you're like most people, you spend a significant portion of every week of your life at your job. You also spend quite a lot of time *thinking* about your job. What do I need to do next? How do I maximize profit, or how do I solve that problem, or how do I communicate this need?

It may well be that at least some of your thoughts about your job are not just about operations. They're about the meaning of it all. Why am I doing this? What's the purpose of it, and do I want to keep doing it? How is this job affecting me as a human being, making my life better or worse? Is it all worth it, and why?

Those are good questions, of course. But if you're a Christian, there's another set of questions that is even more important—questions that have to do with how your work fits into God's intentions for your life. Is my work shaping my character in a godly direction? How can I do my work, not just as a way to put food on the table, but as a sold-out disciple of Jesus? What's the point of work, anyway, in a Christian's life? Is there any meaning to it beyond providing goods and services, making money, and providing a living for myself and my family? And

why, for that matter, does God have us spend so much of our lives doing this one particular thing?

As we've talked with Christians in our own churches and circles of friendship, this concern about the meaning or purpose of work shows up again and again in people's thoughts about their jobs. They want to know how what they do for forty-plus hours a week fits into God's plans. They want to know what purpose it plays, not just in their own lives, but in God's greater intentions for the world. They ask, "This job that takes up so many hours of my life and so much of my mental space, that frustrates me to no end sometimes and gives me great joy at other times—what does it all finally mean?" Those are important questions, and they come from a good and right sense that nothing in our lives, including our jobs, is there simply as "window decoration." It all fits into the great story of creation, sin, and redemption. God has a purpose for all of it.

HOW OUR WORK FITS INTO THE STORY

God's intention, from the very beginning, was for human beings to work. Work is not a result of sin—even though we experience terrible days that tempt us to believe it is! From the moment God created Adam and Eve, he gave them work to do. He made a garden and told them, "Work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15). The work Adam and Eve were meant to do was perfectly joyful, perfectly fulfilling work. There was no mindless toil, no cutthroat competition, no sense of futility. They did everything in service to the Lord himself and in perfect relationship to him. Their work was simply a matter of gathering up God's overflowing blessing to them!

Adam and Eve's sin, of course, changed that. When they disobeyed God's command and rebelled against him, work stopped being purely a reaping of God's abundance. Adam's sin

and God's curse against it affected the very soil of the ground. Work became painful and necessary for Adam's and Eve's very survival. Where once the earth had eagerly produced its fruit—almost holding it out with eager hands and begging Adam and Eve to take it—now the earth became stingy. It withheld its riches, and the humans were forced to labor hard and painfully to get them. Life east of Eden was wholly different from life inside it.

Understanding that part of the Bible's story and work's place in it is actually crucial for us as Christians, because it helps explain why our work will always, to some degree or another, be marked by frustration. Work is hard because both we and the world around us have been affected by our turning away from God. Because of that, it shouldn't surprise us that work is difficult and painful sometimes. Work has a tendency to wear us out and wear us down. It can be a source of massive frustration in our lives. On the other hand, it shouldn't surprise us that when we *do* enjoy our work, there is an always-present danger that our work will swallow us whole—that our hearts will come to be defined by it and we will be reduced to nothing *but* workers.

Work is necessary, work is hard, and work is even dangerous. For all that, however, it's still clear that God cares deeply about how we think about and relate to our jobs. What you do and how you do it are not uninteresting to him. When Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead to redeem a people for himself, he also committed to conform them more and more closely to him by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Bible tells us he does that through all the circumstances of our lives—including our jobs. Our jobs are one of the primary ways God intends to make us more like Jesus. He uses our work to sanctify us, develop our Christian character, and teach us to love him more and serve him better until we join him on the last day in resting from our labors.

The New Testament actually makes a pretty big deal of how we should think about our work. The following passages of Scripture are crucial if we're going to have a biblical understanding of our jobs and their purposes in God's plan of redemption.

In Ephesians 6:5, 7, the apostle Paul tells us to perform our jobs "with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ . . . Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people." In Colossians 3:22–24, he tells us we should do so "with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord." "Whatever you do," Paul goes on to write, "work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters . . . It is the Lord Christ you are serving."

What amazing statements those are! Look more closely at what the Bible says about your job: Whatever you do, you are to do it "*as if you were serving the Lord, not people.*" You are to work "with all your heart, *as working for the Lord and not for human masters.*" Do you see the incredible significance of those phrases? Work is not just a way to pass the time and make money. Your job is actually service that you render *to the Lord himself!*

Do you think about your job like that? Do you realize that no matter what your job is, no matter what it is you do in it, no matter who your boss is or even your boss's boss, what you do in your job is actually done in service to King Jesus! He is the One who deployed you there for this time of your life, and it is for him that you ultimately work.

YOU WORK FOR THE KING, AND THAT CHANGES . . . EVERYTHING!

That's really the big idea of this book. No matter what you do, your job has inherent purpose and meaning because you are doing it ultimately for the King. *Who you work for is more important than what you do.* The world will tell you otherwise. The

world will tell you that life finds its meaning in success at work, or that work is just a necessary evil on the path to leisure. All those ways of thinking are lies. You *do* work for someone beyond your boss. You work for Jesus. That fact is the most important thing you can know and remember about your work. It's much more important than the job itself, regardless of whether you're a homemaker, a banker, a political staffer, a construction worker, a barista, or a corporate executive. No matter what you are doing, you are doing it to glorify Jesus.

If you keep that one big idea in mind, it will change the way you think about your work and engage in your work. Why? Because when glorifying Jesus is our primary motivation, our work—regardless of what that work is in its particulars—becomes an act of worship. We are freed completely from thinking that our work is without meaning and purpose, and we are equally freed from thinking our work holds some *ultimate* meaning. Even more, we discover anew the connection between our jobs and our primary identity as disciples of Jesus. We stop disengaging from our role as disciples from nine to five each day. On the contrary, our engagement with our jobs becomes one of the primary ways we express our discipleship to and love for our Lord.

Work matters. Nobody disputes that. But working *for the King* matters more. As we'll see throughout this book, this realization provides both the day-to-day motivation for our work *and* practical answers to some difficult situations we encounter in the workplace. More than that, it puts work in its rightful place—full of meaning and purpose, but not in competition with the One for whom the work is done in the first place. We work, and that matters. But it matters above all because it's done for King Jesus.

IDLENESS AND IDOLATRY: THE WRONG WAYS TO THINK ABOUT WORK

Remembering that we work for the King and doing our jobs every day in light of that reality aren't easy. It's far easier to slip into thinking wrongly about our jobs than to do the hard work of keeping a godly perspective on them. And there are so many ways to get it wrong, aren't there? We find ourselves grumbling about our jobs or being lazy in them. We do just enough to keep ourselves out of trouble. Or, on the other hand, we find ourselves giving our lives over to our jobs and neglecting our families, our churches, and even our own spiritual health. It all seems so complicated.

But is it really? When we get right down to it, it seems that most of the sins we face when it comes to our jobs can be boiled down to a couple of pitfalls. On the one hand, we can let our job become an *idol*. Our work can become the primary object of our passions, our energy, and our love. We end up worshipping our job. On the other hand, we can slip into being *idle* in our work. When we fail to see God's purposes in our work, we don't really care much about it. We fail to give any attention to it, or we despise it and generally neglect our responsibility to serve as if we are serving the Lord. Unfortunately, idleness *in* work and idolatry *of* work are both celebrated in our society. We tend to praise those who make work the center of their lives, as well as those who have somehow pushed it out of their lives entirely. Both of these pitfalls, though—idleness and idolatry—are deadly misunderstandings of how God wants us to think about our jobs.

We'll explore both idolatry and idleness in more detail later. For now, it's enough to recognize that neither of them square well with the biblical idea that we work for King Jesus. How can we be idle—working without purpose and meaning—if the King himself has assigned our work to us and if we do it

in service to him? How can we be content slacking off in our jobs and doing them halfheartedly if, in reality, we do what we do *for him*? When we work for the King, idleness in our work is simply not an option. But neither is idolatry. If our work is a means of rendering service to the King and worshiping him, we must fight the temptation to make our work the center of our lives. Jesus, not our job, deserves to be the central object of our heart's devotion.

A LOOK AHEAD

The two of us have served in both the marketplace and in ministry. Sebastian (Seb) has been an employee, a boss, an owner, and an entrepreneur, as well as a husband, father, church member, and lay leader in his church. Greg has done many of those things as well, and he also serves as pastor of a church. Together, we have wrestled with the questions we have raised, and we've turned to God's Word to better understand what it means for Christians to be faithful workers, serving King Jesus in a secular world. We are simply a businessman and a pastor who have reflected on these questions and hope to share some useful thoughts with you. We wrote this book because *we* need to be reminded regularly how to apply the gospel to our work.

This book is not a theology of work. It is not intended to lay out everything the Bible teaches about work or to answer every question Christians may have about work. There are some thorny theological issues we won't acknowledge or address. We hope you're not disappointed. Our hope is that this book will help some Christians to see a little more clearly why God has given them work to do and how they might be thinking about work in sinful ways. We hope this book will help some Christians forsake both idolatry and idleness in favor of a more biblical way of thinking about work as service to King Jesus.

In the first four chapters of the book, we'll take a close look at both idolatry of work and idleness in work and then consider how a biblical understanding that we work for Jesus challenges and disarms both those sins. In chapters 5–11, we'll try to apply this biblical mind-set to a number of practical questions. One final note: we intend for this book in its entirety to be “spoken” by both of us. Occasionally, however, you'll run across a story that's written using “I” instead of “we.” When that happens, we'll try to indicate which of us is telling the story.

We don't know why you picked up this book. Maybe as you've read this introduction, you've already admitted to yourself, “Yep, I have idolized my work,” or “That's me. I've fallen into idleness in my work. I just don't see God's point in it all.” Maybe you're a new Christian, and you're wondering how this new life you have in Jesus works itself out in your nine to five. Or maybe it's something else entirely. Our hope is that no matter what confusion you've harbored about what it means to work as a Christian in a godless world, the big idea we've talked about will begin to free you to experience purpose and meaning in your work. If your tendency is toward idleness—toward a false idea that God doesn't care about your work—then we hope this book will remind you that you work for King Jesus and that your work matters very much. On the other hand, if your tendency is toward idolatry—toward a false idea that work matters above all and holds the key to ultimate satisfaction—then we pray this book will transform your work from an object of worship into a means of worshiping the one true God.

More than anything, we hope you will be encouraged to grow in your love for and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ as you pursue his purposes for you in the workplace.

INTRODUCTION

Note: If you are reading this book with others—

At the end of each chapter we provide several questions and Scripture passages for you to study that will help you to further reflect on and think about the ideas in that chapter. These questions are designed to be used as you read the book with a friend or a small group. Consider who can walk through these with you. It's important to have other people you can be honest with and who can be honest with you. Proverbs 16:13 reads, "Kings take pleasure in honest lips; they value the one who speaks what is right," and Proverbs 27:6 states, "Wounds from a friend can be trusted." Find people who can speak the truth and wound you in love.



CHAPTER 1

THE IDOLATRY OF WORK

I (Seb) remember the first time I realized that work had become an idol for me. The moment came just after a high point in my professional career path. A friend and I had started a company, and for the last few years we had poured ourselves—heart, soul, and body—into it, and the company had done well. Five years into the venture, for all kinds of reasons, we decided the time had come to sell the company. The group to which we ended up selling had pursued us for several years, but our answer had always been, “No thanks.” This time, however, the time seemed right. Over the next few months, we went through a surreal experience of negotiating the sale. When the last phase—the “Lawyers Talking to Accountants” phase—was done, it was time to close the deal.

I still remember the closing. I was in Anaheim, California, when my business partner called from Washington, DC, to give me the play-by-play of the signing. He read through the documents once more. I asked a few questions about some details, and then he signed and faxed off the papers. The ownership of our company was transferred to someone else, and a not-insignificant chunk of change to us.



It was a great day! It was also the beginning of a new era in my life. God was about to teach me something new about myself and about the way I approached my work. Once the dust had settled from the sale, I was faced with a new reality: I had to find something else to do. Eager, optimistic, and excited to see where God would lead me in my professional life, I started looking around for fresh opportunities.

I looked for a long time. A really long time. Doors closed. Applications were rejected. Phone calls were ignored. E-mails were “lost.” At the end of several months of searching, I was running out of ideas. I trusted that God was leading me somewhere, but it was to a place I had never anticipated or desired. He had led me to unemployment, and right along with it to hopelessness and a profound and utterly unfamiliar sense of self-doubt. My emotions had plummeted from the top of the world to a place of despair in just a few months. My hopes, which had been so high during the sale of my company, were now ruined. My faith in God was barely limping along.

How did this happen? Why did I experience such a profound shift of my emotions and hopes? Why was my faith shaken so deeply? Looking back, I can see why. My hopes had not been rooted in God; they had been rooted in my circumstances—in my professional success and in my ability to control the future. Work had become an idol to me. My sense of well-being—my very identity as a person—was wrapped up in my professional success. Once that was gone, I was devastated. My god had been ripped out from under me. And I fell hard.

WHAT IS AN IDOL?

What does it mean when we say that a person has made work an idol? Does it simply mean he or she works too hard? Is it idolatrous to enjoy what we do, to find pleasure in our work? How



about enjoying what we do *a lot*? Is it wrong to want to leave our mark on the world, to “put a dent in the universe” (as Steve Jobs once put it)? These can all be perfectly good motivations for our work, and none of them is necessarily wrong. The trouble starts when our pursuit of enjoyment or influence or status in our work begins to make our work the source of ultimate satisfaction or meaning for us. When that happens, our work has become our god.

The Bible tells us that our hearts are desperately prone to worshipping idols. We are worshipers by our very nature as human beings. *We will* find something to bow before, something to give our lives and our devotion to. *We will* worship something. *We will* center our lives around something.

Our compulsion to worship is not a bad thing! God made us for worship. Worship is a very good thing as long as the object of our worship is *worthy* of our worship. So what is the right object for our worship? Only God himself. Jesus once said, “Worship the Lord your God and serve him *only*” (Luke 4:8, emphasis added). Our worship should be reserved for God. He alone should command our highest devotion, and it should be around him that we center and organize our lives. When that pride of place goes to anything or anyone else, we have bowed our knees to an idol.

In the Old Testament, idols were just like you’d picture them — the little golden statues that Indiana Jones swiped from the Temple of Doom. Of course, they weren’t always golden, and they weren’t always small. People worshiped these physical objects because they believed they somehow represented real gods, spiritual beings with power to meet their needs. People performed all kinds of worshipful acts toward their idols, casting riches at their feet, clothing them in the finest clothes, even physically bowing down to them. They organized their lives around their devotion to the gods these idols represented.



We tend not to be quite so crass in our idolatry today. Typically, we don't have little golden statues to venerate, nor do we gather at temples to lavish gifts on those statues. We've become more sophisticated in our idolatry, but our tendency to worship things other than God is just as strong as ever. For many people today, their passion is their job and all of the things their job can provide for them—money, status, identity, pleasure, and purpose. Our jobs capture our hearts and our devotion. We give ourselves to them day in and day out. They become the primary object of our passions, our energy, and our love. We may not be willing to admit it, but we worship our jobs.

Luke 18:18–29 helps us better understand what it means to let something become an idol for us. A rich ruler comes to Jesus to learn what is required of him to inherit eternal life. Jesus tells him, and the man excitedly says that this is exactly what his life has *always* looked like! But then Jesus probes the one area of his life that the young man wants to keep for himself. “You still lack one thing,” Jesus says. “Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” The Bible says that when the young man heard this “he became very sad, because he was very wealthy.” Jesus thus revealed the man's idol—his love for money and the security and status it provided to him. His idol kept him from following Jesus.

Do you see the point of this story? It gives us one of the clearest and simplest pictures of idolatry in the entire Bible. *An idol is something that you desire more than you desire Jesus.*

DO YOU MAKE AN IDOL OF YOUR WORK?

It's easy to make your job an idol. Our culture drives us to be successful, but success is typically defined in specific ways. Think about the conversations you have when you meet someone new. One of the first questions you likely ask is, “What do



you do?” At this point, the pressure is on to convince the other person that what we do is important and that we are good at it. The social cues around us push us to find our identity in our jobs—in the things we do.

Idolizing your work, however, is more than just a bad idea; it’s a deadly spiritual danger. If your pursuit of joy, satisfaction, and meaning centers on “what you do” and “what you are accomplishing,” you’ll find nothing but emptiness at the end of that road. Deep and lasting satisfaction can only be found when our worship is directed at the one who alone deserves it—Jesus Christ.

Our jobs become idols when we overidentify with them. Our work becomes the primary consumer of our time, our attention, and our passions, as well as the primary means for measuring our happiness and our dissatisfaction in life. So what are some of the warning signs that this is happening? Here are some of the most common ways we idolize our jobs. See if any of these describe you.

1. Your work is the primary source of your satisfaction.

It is all too easy to look for fulfillment from your work, finding your ultimate purpose in job performance and success in the workplace. For some, this kind of idolatry takes the subtle form of insisting they will do only what they were “made to do” and refusing to do—or do well—anything less than what they are passionate about. For others, this can take the form of a constant, grinding frustration—a sense that their work is not completely fulfilling. For others, it’s the opposite—a deep-seated self-satisfaction in what they have already accomplished.

What about you? Does success at work fill a big need in your life? Do you find your mood radically shifting as your professional stock goes up and down? Our jobs can never provide the kind of satisfaction and fulfillment we’re demanding of them. They simply were not intended to bear these expectations. So it shouldn’t surprise us when the satisfaction we experience through our work fades or fails to sustain us.



It's like a child riding his scooter. He can ride it around the driveway well enough, but then he gets angry when the scooter doesn't fly. We may find it humorous or amusing, but the little boy grows increasingly frustrated and angry, kicking the scooter and shouting at it. Of course, the problem is simple: scooters aren't designed to fly. The child is confused about the purpose of the scooter—it's not *supposed* to fly! It's meant to be ridden. If the child had appropriate expectations for his scooter, he'd enjoy it more.

The same is true of our jobs. If we have appropriate expectations for our jobs, we will likely find ourselves enjoying them more. Our jobs were never intended to carry the weight of providing us with ultimate, lasting satisfaction. And when we try to make them carry that freight, we will find ourselves quickly disappointed.

2. *Your work is all about being the best so you can make a name for yourself.* Your job can become an idol when you place an undue emphasis on the pursuit of excellence. Of course, there's nothing inherently wrong with working hard and doing your work well. In fact, that's something God requires of us! The problem is in our desire to be *recognized* as being good at something. This can easily become an idol. We want to look good. We want people to take notice of us and praise us for our abilities. We want them to value us and ultimately . . . to glorify us.

This expression of workplace idolatry often leads to a perpetually competitive mind-set. Mentally, we're always keeping score. "Am I as good as those guys?" "How do my accomplishments stack up against that person?" Some competition can be healthy, driving us to reach a little further and work a little harder. However, this becomes disastrous when our desire to be at the top begins to rule our hearts. Even when we succeed, the idolatry of success can leave us feeling like it's just not good enough—an unrelenting perfectionism. And if we don't suc-



ceed, the idolatry of success can lead to soul-destroying discouragement or grim resignation.

3. *Your work becomes primarily about making a difference in the world.* Another way our work becomes an idol is when we think that the ultimate purpose of our work is to bring some benefit to the people around us. There is something profoundly *right* about a desire to make a difference in the world around us. However, that desire can also elevate itself into idolatry if we believe that the value of our work is ultimately determined by its impact on the world.

When our desire to have an impact takes priority, it is possible that God and his purposes will be squeezed out of the picture. This expression of idolatry fills us with pride, as we take credit for the things our work is accomplishing instead of recognizing these achievements as gifts from God. Making a difference or working to “change the world” can also lead us to neglect other God-given responsibilities. We justify our neglect because we are doing something good—serving others. Then if our efforts don’t produce the results we want to see, we get discouraged and angry; we become frustrated and think our work was simply a waste of time.

Every form of idolatry—every act of worshiping something that is not worthy of our worship—will bear bitter fruit in our lives. Good and godly desires can quickly be transformed into idols, producing covetousness, comparison, dissatisfaction, and unrelenting competitiveness. Idolatry is the classic bait and switch. Idols promise fulfillment, but they never provide it. We are left with increasing dissatisfaction and unfulfilled longing.

WHY WORK IS A TERRIBLE GOD

God tells us that nothing in this world is worthy of our worship except Jesus. Everything else, including our jobs, will fail to satisfy in this life and will be useless for the next one.



Why is that? Why can't we find deep and lasting satisfaction in our jobs? Why don't they bring about the fulfillment we so often convince ourselves they will? The answer is that our hearts will *always* grasp for more. If you give yourself to the idol of work, you'll find it is an impossible taskmaster, a slave driver that can never be completely satisfied. It will always disappoint us and let us down. It will never finally grant the satisfaction it promises.

I remember the first time I (Seb) recognized this truth. As a freshman at Princeton University, I was walking across campus one day and realized I'd achieved the one driving goal of all the work I'd done throughout high school: I was a student at an Ivy League school! In that same moment, though, I also realized I wasn't satisfied. Why not? Because I realized high school had simply been a stepping-stone to Princeton, and now Princeton had become a stepping-stone to some other goal. Princeton had seemed like the goal, but it really wasn't. I still wasn't satisfied. I wanted more.

Thinking about all this, I started asking myself a simple question: *What's next?*

- So here I am at the fancy college; great, what's next?
- A great job right out of college; check, what's next?

The logic of idolatry is clear in my thinking. There will *always* be a next step, *always* something more for me to attain. Working for myself and my own fulfillment will *always* end in dissatisfaction.

- Started and successfully built a great company; all right, what's next?
- Huge home and vacation house; got 'em, what's next?
- Produced a Hollywood movie; what's next?



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- Bought a baseball team and can treat it like my fantasy team; yea, what's next?
- Richer than Bill Gates — \$40 billion in the bank and \$40 billion given to charities; what's next?

The problem became astonishingly clear: at every step along the way I was looking forward to the next thing, something that might finally fulfill that promise of satisfaction for me. But I couldn't find it.

It's not just the fact that our hearts will always grasp for "What's next?" though; it's also the bracing fact that the Bible tells us our work is cursed! When human beings rebelled against God and plunged the world into sin, our labor became back-breakingly difficult, and its fruits hard-won and fleeting. We only make matters worse when we fail to recognize that reality and start seeking ultimate, lasting satisfaction in our work.

Here's the fundamental problem with letting our work become an idol: There is always more that can be done, more that can be achieved. There is always a "What's next?" to pursue. We can always improve our work just a little more. We can always help more people, make the city a little bit better. We can always make our work a little more efficient and a little easier. The goalposts keep moving, and satisfaction proves elusive.

SO WHAT'S THE FIX FOR IDOLATRY OF WORK?

The bottom line truth of all this is that this world is simply not worth living for. Oh, it claims to be! And it makes all kinds of promises about the good it can give us if we just burn our lives out in its service. But only God himself is truly worth living for. Only he can bring ultimate, lasting satisfaction.

So what about you? How have you been looking too much for happiness, joy, fulfillment, or purpose in your job? Have you



THE GOSPEL AT WORK

found yourself wanting the good your job promises more than you've desired Jesus? Have you made your work an idol? If so, the solution is simple, though not easy: You need to repent! You need to turn from that futile and wrong way of thinking, recognize your idolatry of work for what it is, and refocus your mind on *working as an act of worship to God*. When you do that, you'll find to your great joy that the goalposts suddenly stop moving. That's because once you ground your life and joy and satisfaction in God, there is no "What's next?"

Why not? Because there is no need for anything more.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. Read and Reflect: Luke 18:18–29
2. Is devotion to your work a primary organizing principle of your life? What would those who know you best (friends, family members) say?
3. The chapter lists several warnings about ways we can sinfully make work an idol. In what ways do you make work an idol?
4. Making work an idol can be a subtle sin, one often cloaked in otherwise seemingly good intentions, like working hard, earning money, and so forth. Name some practical ways you can guard against making work an idol.
5. Think of a time in your life when you were satisfied with an accomplishment in your work. Maybe it was a well-written paper, a well-delivered presentation, or a completed building project. How long did that sense of accomplishment last? What does that experience suggest about the futility of making your work an idol?
6. What are the “What’s Nexts?” in your life? How can you hold these loosely?