PRODUCTIVE: FINDING JOY IN WHAT WE DO
Work and rest. What’s the biblical balance?

Balance.

Many of us work too much, fueled by a workaholic drive. Others barely make an effort, doing the minimum to stay employed and get a paycheck. Both groups need balance.

Many of us earn more than we personally need and fill our lives with experiences and stuff. Others among us struggle to get by. Both groups need balance.

This study lifts up the biblical mandates to work and to rest. It points us to actions that achieve balance.

As we apply biblical principles, we move from living and earning for ourselves to discovering that our jobs and paychecks are resources we can invest for the kingdom of God.

Ronnie and Nick Floyd

Ronnie and Nick Floyd co-wrote this study. Ronnie has served as the Senior Pastor of Cross Church in Northwest Arkansas for more than 26 years. Nick Floyd, Ronnie’s son, is one of the teaching pastors at Cross Church, preaching weekly at the Fayetteville Campus.

This growing and innovative multi-site church is reaching thousands every week for Jesus Christ. Read Ronnie’s blog at RonnieFloyd.com. Follow Ronnie and Nick on Twitter: @RonnieFloyd and @NickFloyd8.
SESSION 1

GOOD WORK
The Point
Work is a gift from God, not a curse.

The Bible Meets Life
Work. We treat it like a necessary evil to earn a paycheck. While many of us have jobs we enjoy, others of us have jobs that are tedious or even boring. We dread going to work. Even when we get home, we tackle a lot of our responsibilities with a sense of drudgery. The Bible does not gloss over the stress and difficulty that can come with work, but that was not God’s original intent. Work is a good thing, and God’s plan is for us to approach any task with responsibility and joy.

The Passage
Genesis 1:28; 2:8-9, 15-17

The Setting
Genesis 1 tells us of God’s work of creation. Genesis 2 focuses on one aspect of that creation: His creation of man, the culmination of His creation. God placed Adam in the garden of Eden. In the midst of this perfect setting, Adam was given the assignment to work the garden and watch over it. With that task came the freedom to enjoy the garden and the fruit of his work.
Key Words

garden (2:8)—This word comes from a Hebrew verb meaning “to defend” or “protect.” In the garden in Eden, Adam and Eve experienced God’s full protection and provision.

knowledge of good and evil (2:9)—Interpretations of this phrase vary but this is clear: this tree offered knowledge that was unnecessary, inappropriate, and forbidden for humanity. It led to shame, punishment, and expulsion.

Genesis 1:28; 2:8-9,15-17 (HCSB)

1:28 God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth.”

2:8 The Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there He placed the man He had formed.

9 The Lord God caused to grow out of the ground every tree pleasing in appearance and good for food, including the tree of life in the middle of the garden, as well as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

15 The Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it.

16 And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree of the garden,

17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for on the day you eat from it, you will certainly die.”
GET INTO THE STUDY

DISCUSS: Ask the opening question on page 9 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG):
“What did you like best about your first job?” #BSFLGoodWork

GUIDE: Call for a show of hands, first asking who agrees that most people see work as a curse. Then call for a show of hands, asking who agrees that most people see work as a gift.

SAY: “The sometimes-surprising news is that work is a gift from God and not a curse. God gave Adam work before sin entered the picture.”

ENHANCEMENT: To introduce this study use Pack Item 1: “Productive.”

TRANSITION: Let’s find out what the Bible says about work, and how we can view work as a gift from God, not a curse.

PRAY: Ask God to bless the study of His Word and to help group members view their work from His perspective.
Genesis 1:28

28 God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth.”

GUIDE: Direct group members to search Genesis 1:28 for commands God gave to Adam and Eve.

GUIDE: Direct the group to use the bulleted points in the “Genesis 1:28” section on page 12 of the PSG to grasp the meaning of the commands, and how work is interwoven with following those commands. Briefly these are:

- **Reproduce**: Adam and Eve were to have children who would also reproduce and fill the earth.

- **Bring order**: The picture here is one of subduing. This represents the responsibility for Adam and Eve to work faithfully to take advantage of the natural resources that God put around them.

- **Rule**: Adam and Eve were to have dominion over all the fish, birds, and every living thing. God established an order right from the beginning.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 12 of the PSG: “What is the relationship between God’s blessing and our work?”

TRANSITION: Next, in Genesis 2:8-9 we’ll find two important factors in understanding work as a gift from God.
Genesis 1:28 Commentary

The concept of work has been misunderstood. Scripture distinctly indicates work as a part of creation and thus not bad or punishment from God. God entrusted Adam and Eve with working, tending, and taking care of the garden as His agents. The first couple was to work with and on behalf of God in the garden. This coworking, ordained by God, was a gift from God to Adam and Eve to be shared with one another.

The creation narrative shows people as the crowning point of God’s creation. The Creator and creation interact with one another in love and commitment. This interaction between God and man is highlighted in Genesis 1:28, where he charges humanity with tasks: be fruitful, multiply, subdue, rule over the creation. The couplets (fruitful/multiply, subdue/rule) are summed up as procreation and dominion.

First, Yahweh told Adam and Eve to be fruitful, multiply. God had instructed the animals to be fruitful and multiply (1:22). But the command to be fruitful, multiply is given to the first couple with God said to them. This implies personal relationship between Creator and Adam and Eve. This personal note highlights humanity’s intrinsic connection to Yahweh as the image of God spoken in 1:26. God created the first human life; Adam and Eve shared in this divine prerogative by propagating humanity. Reproduction is a blessing and a gift from God to be enjoyed in marriage.

Second, God gave humanity dominion over nature via subduing and ruling. Subduing in Hebrew usually carries the connotation of a display of force. However, in this case subdue is best seen as “bringing into submission” or “subjugating.” God is specific of what humanity is to subjugate—fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth. Adam and Eve as well as their descendants received the task of “stewardship” of every living creature (Prov. 12:10; 27:23; and Deut. 25:4). Closely related to the idea of subduing is the notation of ruling. Here the concept of ruling in Hebrew might be best understood as “impelling,” “taming,” or “subordinating.” Since Adam and Eve were created in the image of God, they were given the divine prerogative to rule, tame, or subordinate the earth on behalf of Yahweh. This is not to be done in a harsh manner; rather, it was to be done on behalf of the Creator in love and commitment. The first couple was to imitate Yahweh in their work.

As the couple set about to follow the commands of Yahweh, they were to further the human species by procreation and exercise loving dominion over the earth He had given them. In following these commands, Adam and Eve revealed they were in a covenant commitment with God. The human line would continue to grow and serve as regents on behalf of the Almighty. The Scriptures are clear that the tasks Yahweh commanded of Adam and Eve were not burdensome nor were they harsh; rather, they were a template for future generations that would follow the couple (Col. 3:23).
Genesis 2:8-9,15

8 The L ORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there He placed the man He had formed. 9 The LORD God caused to grow out of the ground every tree pleasing in appearance and good for food, including the tree of life in the middle of the garden, as well as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. 15 The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it.

SAY: “God placed Adam and Eve in a specific location. God also caused the land to flourish.”

READ: Genesis 2:8-9,15.

GUIDE: Use the commentary on page 17 to highlight reasons work is a gift from God.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 13 of the PSG: “How does your current work fulfill your purpose and advance God’s kingdom?”

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 13 of the PSG: “How is your work a part of God’s overall design?”

TRANSITION: Adam was given freedom to enjoy the garden and the fruit of his work, but he was to do so with obedience.
Contextually 2:8-9,15 follow the creation of Adam by Yahweh. Note this progression and sequence. Note also that Eden was not simply a place of leisurely enjoyment; Adam was given responsibility to work and guard the garden of God! The term garden in 2:8 has a rich history in the Bible, especially the Old Testament. Used alone it can refer to simple designations such as a vegetable garden (Deut. 11:10) or a well-watered and tended garden (Isa. 58:11; Jer. 31:12). Yet in Genesis 2 “garden” signifies that the owner is God Himself. God planted the garden and gave Adam the job of tending His creation. This garden God planted and Adam tended was an oasis—a place of contentment, joy, and repose. Passages such as Isaiah 51:3; Ezekiel 36:35; and Joel 2:3 point to the coming reversal of humanity’s fall within the garden.

Yahweh planted the garden in Eden, in the east after the creation of Adam (2:7). God planted the garden not for the sake of planting; He did so to provide for humanity. Adam and Eve—and offspring—needed sustenance. This garden and humanity’s responsible tending would provide that nourishment. As a proper noun “Eden is used nearly 20 times in the Old Testament. Eden is often thought to derive from the Hebrew implying land of bliss or happy land. Eden was a place for humanity to grow and protect.

From the ground in the garden of Eden God made every tree and plant spring forth (2:9). Two particular trees are noted—the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. What is meant by knowledge of good and evil? Perhaps the best interpretation is divine wisdom. It is worth noting that the serpent promised the couple would become as God Himself (3:5). In this light, the knowledge bestowed upon Adam and Eve seems to be a type of wisdom but not what the serpent promised.

An extravagance was lavished upon humanity by God. Not only did Yahweh plant horticulture which was beautiful to the eye (every tree pleasing in appearance) but also fruitful for food (and good for food). God ascetically and practically fed Adam and Eve. Yet, after presenting humanity with the garden, Yahweh explicitly enjoined the first couple to continue to feed themselves from the produce they would collect. Productivity within the garden was good; it was expected of Adam and Eve if they wanted to eat. That Yahweh calls Christians to be productive (in whatever they do) has not changed.

Adam’s job description is in verse 15: The LORD God ... placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it. God designed people to work and be productive. Two verbs give clues about Adam’s role in the garden. First, Adam was to work it. Interestingly, the Hebrew word here conveys the ideas of labor, service that is rendered (often for or on behalf of Yahweh), or even. Working, as evidenced by Scripture, can constitute consecrated service on behalf of God or even a service of worship. This happens as we allow God to direct our attitudes. Second, Adam was to watch over the garden.
Genesis 2:16-17

16 And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree of the garden, 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for on the day you eat from it, you will certainly die.”

READ: Genesis 2:16-17.

GUIDE: Direct the group to examine the choices Adam had, and compare those to choices we have. These choices are named in the “Genesis 2:16-17” section on page 14 of the PSG. Repeat that work is a gift from God and not a curse.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 14 of the PSG: “What choices in your work will lead to blessing or curse?”

SUMMARIZE: We must stay on guard against the enemy’s tactics of causing discontent over the work God has given us to do. The enemy tries to get us to forget that work is a gift from God.

DO: Guide the group to complete the activity on page 15 of the PSG. Consider bringing paper on which to write notes of gratitude, suggesting group members write to what they’d like to say to these model workers now.

MODEL WORKER

Who taught you the value of work? Jot down characteristics about this person’s attitude regarding work and what you learned: _________________________
______________________________________________________________

TRANSITION: Let’s look at some ways to live out the truth that our work is a gift from God, not a curse.
Genesis 2:16-17 Commentary

We tend to focus on the prohibition God put upon humanity in 2:16-17, namely, “You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Yet to focus only on this prohibition is to miss a major blessing God gave Adam. In 2:16 Yahweh told Adam, “You are free to eat from any tree of the garden.” This declarative statement has within it an implicit expectation of required obedience. We know that Adam was capable of obedience, for we see his naming of the animals in 2:19-20 at God’s insistence. Clearly in 2:19-20, God and Adam were at peace, and harmony existed within their relationship. God addressed Adam personally and individually as a created being. This is significant because in the eyes of Yahweh, Adam was a unique person with whom He communed. God set both positive and negative boundaries for humanity—a set of parameters for the physical and spiritual safety.

Notice carefully that as long as Adam obediently worked with God, all of creation was at peace! When humanity rebelled and shunned the divine partnership, creation suffered in grave turmoil (see Gen. 3).

The one restriction placed upon Adam was unvarnished and unbending. God demonstrated His love for humanity by warning them against rebellion. Of all the created order on earth, they bore both physical flesh and immaterial spirit. Adam and Eve were not merely flesh and thus like the animals, nor were they simply of the spiritual realm and thus like the angels. The first couple were uniquely created. They were, like each of us, crafted in the image of God and yet possessing freedom to labor with God or against Him.

In light of Genesis 2, what should our response be? When humans labor along with God there is an undeniable and blessed harmony. As we labor, we must keep in mind the plain truth of Scripture concerning work. Genesis 2 tells us that work is of God and not a result of the curse.

A catastrophic break in the divine/human harmony is painfully obvious in Genesis 3. Therefore, let us embrace work as a good thing, as a gift from God. God’s plan is for us to approach any task with responsibility and joy. When we embrace the labor which God puts before us, we find that we become content and the cares of this world are momentary. Does this mean jobs that are downright difficult will suddenly become joyful? Not necessarily. But if we see our labor (in whatever we do) as a God-ordained gift, then our outlook will be tempered by not what we do but for whom we do it! What has God called you to do with Him? What work has He given you? Jesus shows plainly in Matthew 25 that our labor with God does not go unnoticed. Whatever we do either in word or deed must be done with God by the parameters He has set for us in the Scriptures. Paul emphasized the ultimate target of our efforts when, in Colossians 3:23, he warned the church at Colossae, “Whatever you do, do it enthusiastically, as something done for the Lord and not for men.”
LIVE IT OUT

SAY: “So how do we choose to appreciate God’s gift of work?”

➢ **Guard against discontentment.** When you feel dissatisfied at work, mentally list at least three ways God has blessed you in your job.

➢ **Encourage a coworker.** Find a tangible way to encourage someone in their work. For example, leave a thank you note for the custodial crew. Give words of appreciation to the supervisor who led an excellent meeting.

➢ **Thank a work mentor.** Recall the person you described in the page 15 activity. Write that person a note or message to express gratitude for teaching you how to work. Share in your note one or two key attributes that person modeled for you.

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**Wrap It Up**

SAY: “God uses work to teach us how to follow Him more deeply. So hop out of bed, get the coffee going, and anticipate what God will do.”

GUIDE: Remind group members to use the QR code below the “Live It Out” section on page 16 of the PSG to read the free supporting article.
My group’s prayer requests

Additional suggestions for specific groups (women, men, parents, boomers, and singles) are available at BibleStudiesforLife.com/blog.

Accept His Plan

Something seemed amiss ... I had been faithfully serving as a full-time music minister for 32 years. I loved my work. I was good at it. Though I had my share of struggles in church life, I had always imagined retiring as a full-time music minister.

That was not to be.

To continue reading “Accept His Plan” from Mature Living magazine, visit BibleStudiesforLife.com/articles.