

a study guide

to Sebastian Traeger and Greg Gilbert's

THE GOSPEL AT WORK



HOW WORKING
FOR KING JESUS
GIVES PURPOSE
AND MEANING
TO OUR JOBS

a Guide to This Guide

This study guide is meant to help lead small groups through a discussion of The Gospel at Work in six sessions. It can also be used by individual readers.

Here are the topics and sections of the book each session covers:

Session 1:	The Challenge: Idol vs. Idle (Introduction, Chapters 1-2)
Session 2:	The King's Purposes (Chapters 3-4)
Session 3:	My Assignments: Work, Church, Family (Chapters 5-6)
Session 4:	Relationships at Work (Chapters 7-8)
Session 5:	Sharing the Gospel at Work (Chapter 9)
Session 6:	Success and Value (Chapter 10 and Conclusion)

Ideally, each participant will read the chapters to be covered in The Gospel at Work before each meeting. However, even if a participant doesn't complete a reading, they should still be able to profit from, and contribute to, that session's discussion.

for Leaders:

If you're the group's leader, I'd encourage you to set aside some time to prepare before each meeting. First read through the chapters to be covered in The Gospel at Work, then work through the study guide material for the session. You may decide to alter some of the questions or add questions of your own. That's great!

If you think it would help your group to look at the study material as you discuss it, feel free to print off copies for them.

Videos:

Videos: These six sessions correspond to six video clips in which Sebastian Traeger and Greg Gilbert introduce the book's main ideas. Feel free to kick off your sessions by having the group watch these videos together. They're available at www.thegospelatwork.com/studyguide

I pray God would bless your group's time of thinking together about what it means to work for King Jesus!

Session One

THE CHALLENGE: IDOL VS. IDLE

1. What drew you to this study of how the gospel impacts our work?
What do you hope to get out of these six sessions?
2. What do you do for work? Describe one challenging aspect of your job, and one encouraging aspect.
3. In the Introduction, Greg and Seb introduce the book's main idea: "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.*" (16).
So work becomes an act of worship.
 - What's one way working for Jesus should impact your next day on the job?
4. Are you more tempted to make an *idol* of work or be *idle* in work? How has that changed as your work has changed?

An idol is something that you desire more than you desire Jesus. (26)

5. In chapter 1, Greg and Seb discuss several warning signs that you're idolizing your work (26-29): (1) your work is the primary source of your satisfaction; (2) your work is all about being the best so you can make a name for yourself; (3) your work becomes primarily about making a difference in the world.
 - Do any of these describe you?
 - How do they show up in your life?
 - What happens when your idol disappoints?

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. (30)

6. Work is a terrible god because our hearts will always grasp for more (30).
 - How have you found yourself wanting more in your work, and more from your work?
 - How can you redirect these desires to find satisfaction in Jesus?

7. Chapter 2 describes several subtle kinds of idleness (36-37):
 1. Thinking your work doesn't matter;
 2. Thinking of work as a necessary evil;
 3. Thinking it's okay to slack off if your work isn't your "true calling";
 4. "Slackivism": doing the bare minimum to get through the day;
 5. And "Monday blues": your real life ends when it's time to get back to work.
 - Have you ever considered that idleness is a matter of the heart as much as the hands?
 - Are you tempted toward any of these idle attitudes? Are there others you can spot in yourself?
 - How would your work change if you approached your job as a venue for God's glory and your own growth as a Christian?

8. Think of the last time you fell into idleness in work—you checked out, resented your job, cut corners, whatever it may have been. Describe the situation.
 - What wrong attitudes and beliefs did your idleness reveal?
 - What might God want you to learn through the circumstances he put you in?

Session Two

THE KING'S PURPOSES

1. How would you say that being a Christian impacts your work?
2. The gospel severs the root of both idolatry and idleness in work. In his death and resurrection, Jesus has secured for us eternal joy, joy that surpasses anything our jobs can offer. And if Jesus has purchased us by his death, then everything we are and everything we have belongs to him, including every minute from 9 to 5. So idleness is not an option for Christians. (47-48)
 - What other work-related sins does the gospel sever? And how? (Possibilities include greed, envy, anxiety, pride, and more.)

The gospel is good news to slaves bound in sin who owe a debt they can never repay. The good news is that God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to take on himself the debt we owe to God. Standing as our substitute, in our place, Jesus lived the life we failed to live and died the death we deserved to die. He rose again from the dead, victorious over death, sin, and the grave. (47)

3. The gospel gives you a new master (Jesus), a new assignment (love God and love others), a new confidence (in God's love for you in spite of yourself), and new rewards (God's eternal kingdom). (48-51)
 - What happens when we make an earthly person or thing our ultimate master, assignment, confidence, or reward?
 - How can each of these new gospel-given realities bring freedom in your work?

4. The gospel frees you to worship God through your work, serve others wholeheartedly, trust God in your work, rest from your work, do your work well, and have joy in your work (52-57).
- Which of these do you struggle with the most? Which do you excel in the most?
 - How can you build gospel-reminders into your daily routines to help you remember the freedom the gospel gives?
5. What motivates you to get out of bed and get to work every morning? Do you ever struggle to find motivation to work? If so, why?
6. In chapter 4, we see that the Bible tells us that we should work in order to:
- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Love God (Matt. 22:37); | 4. Earn money
(Prov. 12:11; Eph. 4:28; 2 Thess. 3:10); |
| 2. Love others (Matt. 22:39); | 5. Enjoy it (Eccl. 5:18-19); |
| 3. Reflect God's character
(Gen. 1:26-28, 2:15); | 6. And adorn the gospel (Titus 2:9-10) |
- Are any of these motivations new to you?
 - Pick one to focus on in the next week. Discuss a plan for studying, praying, and reminding yourself of this specific purpose God has for your work.

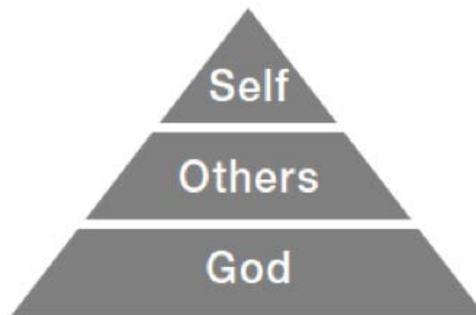
Knowing you are loved by God in spite of yourself turns out to be the real answer to all the things you think you need self-esteem to achieve. (50)

7. Seb's motto in his fight against idolizing work is, "Work hard, work smart, and trust God" (71-72).
- Why does it take faith to work for the King?
 - What does Jesus promise that we don't see now?

Session Three

MY ASSIGNMENTS: WORK, CHURCH, FAMILY

1. Have you ever had the opportunity to choose a job? If so, how did you choose? What factors weighed most heavily in your decision?
2. In chapter 5 the authors present this pyramid as a rubric for how to choose a job:

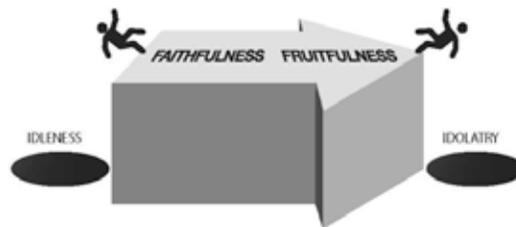


At the load-bearing bottom is our obligation to love and obey God. Next is our responsibility to serve others. Finally, at the top is our desire to please ourselves. The point is that we should think first of the commands to love God and love others. Only if a job will satisfy those two criteria should we consider how it pleases us.

- The last time you chose a job, did you think through it this way?
- When choosing a job, what difference does it make whether you think first about God and others or about yourself?

It is frighteningly easy to fall into idolatry in the process of choosing a job. We make an idol of choosing a job when we base our criterion for 'the right job' on bringing glory and honor to ourselves rather than on bringing honor and glory to God. (76)

3. In light of this pyramid, Greg and Seb present two sets of questions to ask about a potential job. The first are “must-haves,” and the second are “nice-to-haves.” The must-haves are:
1. Does this job glorify God?
 2. Does this job permit me to live a godly life?
 3. Does this job provide for my needs and allow me to be a blessing to others?
 - Have you ever considered a job that didn’t pass these three tests? How did you respond?
 - Given your current work, interests, and training, are there any potential jobs you might consider that could fail to meet these three criteria? How should you respond?
4. Moving up the pyramid, we come to the “nice-to-haves”:
4. Does this job benefit society in some way?
 5. Does this job take advantage of my gifts and talents?
 6. Is this job something I want to do?
 - When we’re dealing with “nice-to-haves,” decisions become more difficult. How do you flesh out these “nice-to-haves” in your own work life? Do you tend to make any of them “must-haves”?
 - Are you willing to forego “nice-to-haves” if a job that satisfies the “must-haves” comes along? Why or why not?
5. For every area of our lives, the Bible provides basic standards of faithfulness. Fail to meet these, and you’re being idle—or just plain disobedient. Beyond this, the Bible also provides principles for pursuing further fruitfulness: multiplying your impact by investing more. Yet Scripture also warns against idolatry. You could put it all together like this:



- Do you struggle to balance the different assignments God has given you in the realms of work, family, and church?
- How can applying this framework help free you from feeling stressed and overburdened?

6. Greg and Seb point out that as far as family is concerned, the Bible's "minimum" standard isn't very "minimum"! Wives are to submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ, and husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the church (Eph. 5:22-25). Parents are to train their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4), and children, likewise, are to obey and honor their parents (Eph. 6:1-3).
- Whatever your family situation, when it comes to serving your family, are you more tempted to idleness or idolatry? Why?
 - What does faithful service to your family look like on a day-to-day basis?
 - How could you pursue greater fruitfulness in caring for your family?

7. Consider your job:
- Are you being faithful to your assignments?
 - Where might you be able to invest for greater fruitfulness?
 - Are there any areas of your job in which you're tempted to idolatry, being mastered by your work instead of serving the Lord?

Fail to meet the minimum requirement of faithfulness, and you fall into idleness. Push beyond fruitfulness, and you fall into idolatry. (92)

8. The Bible expects every Christian to be meaningfully connected to a local church, and to regularly assemble with and encourage the members of that church (1 Cor. 12:12-27; Heb. 10:24-25).
- Are you a member of a local church? Why or why not?
 - Have you ever considered that your responsibility to serve the church is every bit as concrete as your responsibility to work or take care of your family?
 - If that's a new idea to you, what's one step you can take to dive into the life of your church more fully?
 - What's one area of church life you're already faithful in, where you could seek greater fruitfulness?

Session Four

RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK

1. Do you like your boss? What about your coworkers?
2. Greg and Seb write, “Complaints tend to be the common coin of the realm of the workplace. So when someone comes along who doesn’t speak Complaint as their native language, the effect can be astonishing” (107).
 - Are you tempted to complain at work? If so, when and why?
 - Read Philippians 2:14-16. What does Paul say will result when we Christians refuse to grumble and complain? What impact might that have on your job performance, your coworkers, and your boss?
3. Do you find it difficult to submit those in authority over you at work? If so, how come? How can you strive to obey them “with sincerity of heart” (Col. 3:22)?

Paul urges us to obey those who are in authority over us “in everything.” While that command certainly doesn’t include sinful things, it does include stupid things. (106)

4. When was the last time you were assigned to do something at work that you thought was beneath you? How does Philippians 2:5-8 speak to that situation?

5. Why does it matter for your work that all authority is granted by God? Discuss how this applies to the authority you serve under, as well as authority you hold yourself.
6. Authority should bless and serve others, yet it can be terribly abused (2 Sam. 23:3-4; Matt. 20:25). (See 117-119.)
- How have you seen authority abused in the workplace?
 - How have you seen authority bless and serve others in the workplace?
 - Do you ever struggle to rightly submit to authority, or to rightly wield authority?

No matter how high we are in our organization, any authority we hold over other people is given to us by God. “Love your neighbor as yourself” is operative even in the boss’s chair. (116)

7. In Matthew 20:26-28, Jesus tells us what godly authority looks like: “Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”
- What does it look like to serve others in the workplace at cost to yourself?
 - How does this cut against the grain of typical workplace culture?
 - How can you serve others in your workplace this week?

Session Five

SHARING THE GOSPEL AT WORK

1. Have you ever shared the gospel with a coworker? How did it go?
2. What keeps you from sharing the gospel at work more than you do?
 - Consider 2 Corinthians 5:17-20.
How can this passage help inject some evangelistic boldness into your work life?
3. Does the way you work commend the gospel to others? Is there anything about your work habits that works against your evangelistic witness?

We can be as kind, gentle, loving, caring, humble, patient, good, and downright wonderful as we want. And still our coworkers will likely assume we just especially enjoyed our bagel that morning. (126)

4. How comfortable are you “putting God on the table” in conversations with coworkers? Do all your coworkers know you’re a Christian?
5. What are your relationships with your coworkers like? Do they extend beyond the office?

6. Do you ever invite coworkers to engage with other Christians in your life? What are some ways you can leverage the witness of your church to reach out to your coworkers?

As a Christian, you are a fully credentialed, decked-out ambassador of the empire of Jesus the Christ, High King of the universe. God has committed to you the message of reconciliation, the message of the good news that Jesus reconciles sinners to God. And guess what? That's as true from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday as it is for any other hour of your life. (128)

7. Are there many Christians in your field? Do you work with any people who are largely isolated from Christians? How can you get the gospel to them?
8. Think of one coworker you have a good relationship with, but haven't shared the gospel with. What's one step you could take this week toward sharing the good news with them? Share it, write it down, and pray God would enable you to do it.

God may have deployed you in your particular job with all the potential for awkward conversations precisely because he wants you to handle it. So be wise and winsome, but don't morph into worried and wimpy. Speak about the King, even at work. (133)

Session Six

SUCCESS AND VALUE

1. Do you ever question the value of your job compared with pastoring or missions or other “full-time Christian work”? If so, why?
2. On the other hand, do you ever find yourself explaining why your job is more important than the job of whoever you’re talking to? Or if not saying it, then thinking it?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-26. Consider that what Paul says is relevant not just to the church, but also to society as a whole. What does this passage teach us about the question “Whose job is more important?”

What makes you a success is being able to stand before King Jesus one day and say, “Lord, where you deployed me, I served well. I gave it my all. I worked at it with all my heart because I was working for you, not for human masters.” (148)

4. On page 143, Greg and Seb point out that the King deploys us where he wills. “Some he deploys as pastors and missionaries; others he deploys as businesspeople. Ultimately, it is up to him.” Our work assignments are ultimately from God himself.
 - In what ways are you tempted to doubt this truth, or kick against it?
 - How can you apply this mindset to your own job?

5. Discerning God's will comes down to assessing what you want to do, are gifted to do, and have opportunities to do (144). Are you facing any major career decisions now, or in the near future? Talk through how those three categories apply to your situation. (And remember the pyramid from session 3!)

Many Christians struggle daily with perfectionism and comparison, even with envy. If that's you, then hear God's gracious, freeing call to faithfulness rather than to perfection. Working for the King frees us from the tyranny of comparing ourselves to others in order to feel good about ourselves. (149)

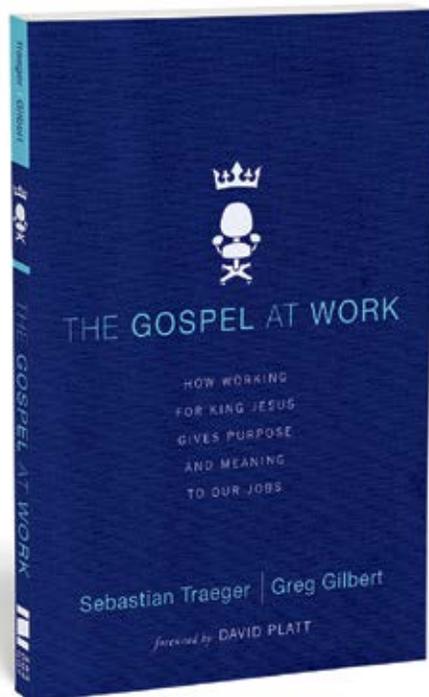
6. How do you define success in your job?
7. Read Proverbs 16:1, 2, 4, 9, and 33. Because God is sovereign in all things, we can define success as simply "working well and trusting God with the outcome" (149).
 - How can this biblical understanding of success free you from anxiety and idolatry in the workplace?

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THE GOSPEL AT WORK

How Working for King Jesus Gives Purpose and Meaning to Our Jobs



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Many Christians fall victim to one of two main problems when it comes to work: either they are idle in their work, or they have made an idol of it. Both of these mindsets are deadly misunderstandings of how God intends for us to think about our employment.

In *The Gospel at Work*, Sebastian Traeger and Greg Gilbert unpack the powerful ways in which the gospel can transform how we do what we do, releasing us from the cultural pressures of both an all-consuming devotion and a punch-in, punch-out mentality—in order to find the freedom of a work ethic rooted in serving Christ.

Find God's vision for your job.
Reclaim God's vision for your life.

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