



# The Word Before Work

A MONDAY-THROUGH-FRIDAY DEVOTIONAL  
TO HELP YOU FIND ETERNAL PURPOSE  
IN YOUR DAILY WORK

JORDAN RAYNOR



WATERBROOK

## THE WORD BEFORE WORK

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Selected material in this work has been adapted from Jordan Raynor’s weekly *The Word Before Work* email newsletter, originally published in 2018–2022.

Hardback ISBN 978-0-593-19311-2

Ebook ISBN 978-0-593-19312-9

The Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file with the Library of Congress.

Printed in Canada on acid-free paper

[waterbrookmultnomah.com](http://waterbrookmultnomah.com)

2 4 6 8 9 7 5 3 1

First Edition

*Book design by Diane Hobbing*

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# Introduction

I spent the first decade of my career as a tech entrepreneur, starting and selling a number of start-ups. I *loved* my work, but I could never kick this nagging feeling that I was a second-class Christian because I wasn't spending Monday through Friday working as a pastor or "full-time missionary." Maybe you've felt the same way.

About halfway through my career in tech, God graciously opened my eyes to what his Word says about work. For the first time, I was seeing that

- God himself worked—not just as a preacher but as a gardener and carpenter (see Genesis 2:8; Mark 6:3)
- the work you and I do as entrepreneurs, artists, managers, janitors, marketers, and stay-at-home parents matters *even when* we're not sharing the gospel (see Romans 8:19-23)
- we'll work *forever* in the New Heavens and New Earth (see Isaiah 65:17-25)
- God has always wanted to do his redemptive work in partnership with human beings (see Genesis 45:4-11)
- the very purpose of our salvation is to do good works—including the good work we do in our offices and at home (see Ephesians 2:10)

For the past few years, I've been expounding on biblical truths like these in my Monday morning devotional, *The Word Before*

Work, which has helped millions of Christians in every country in the world find eternal purpose in their work. One of the most frequent refrains I hear from those readers is “We need these reminders *daily*, not just *weekly*.” This book is my response to that plea.

### **How This Devotional Is Organized**

Prior to writing this devotional, I had read my Bible front to back a few times. But for *The Word Before Work*, I did something new. I read every word of Scripture looking for just one thing: what God has to say about *what* work he’s called us to do, *why* he’s called us to do it, and *how* we are to work in accordance with his commands.<sup>1</sup> Through that exercise, I identified more than one thousand passages of Scripture that relate to our work. This book contains 260 of the most relevant—one for each workday of the year if you work Monday through Friday. If you don’t work Monday through Friday, feel free to create your own cadence for reading through this devotional.

I’ve dedicated the first four weeks of this devotional to helping you build a foundational understanding of what God’s Word says about your work:

- In weeks 1–2, we’ll sketch out the biblical narrative of work.
- In week 3, we’ll see *why* exactly our work matters for eternity in light of that narrative.
- And in week 4, we’ll look at five ways those truths inform how we should work today.

The rest of this book will walk you through the whole of Scripture, focusing on the passages most relevant to your work. In an effort to add some variety to your reading each week, I will *not* be walking you straight from Genesis to Revelation (you’ll thank me when we get to the minor prophets). Instead, we’ll alternate between sequential readings of the Old Testament, New Testament, and Wisdom

Literature (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon) in the following rhythm:

- Mondays: Old Testament
- Tuesdays: New Testament
- Wednesdays: Wisdom Literature
- Thursdays: Old Testament
- Fridays: New Testament

There are a few things I would recommend you consider doing on your nonwork days:

- *Catch up* on any devotionals you missed during the workweek.
- *Pray* more than you would during the week for your work and co-workers.
- *Dig into* the supplemental materials I've included with each devotional.

### **Bonus Resources**

In addition to the content within these pages, I've created a website, [TheWordBeforeWork.com](http://TheWordBeforeWork.com), where I've included free resources to help you dive deeper into the topic of each day's reading. These resources include

- additional Scripture readings
- my interviews with actors, executives, FBI agents, carpenters, novelists, and more on how they're responding to the biblical truth shared in the devotional
- my interviews with pastors and theologians (such as Tim Keller, N. T. Wright, John Mark Comer, Randy Alcorn, Ruth Chou Simons, Mark Batterson, and Gisela Kreglinger) who help illuminate the biblical text

You can dig into these resources throughout the week, only on the weekend—whenever you want! But trust me: You won't want to miss them. Bookmark [TheWordBeforeWork.com](http://TheWordBeforeWork.com) now to maximize your experience with this book.

Okay, are you ready to unpack what God's Word says about your work? Are you ready to understand how the gospel of Jesus Christ enables you to rest from your work while *also* making you wildly ambitious for it? Are you ready to find eternal purpose in what you do Monday through Friday? Then let's begin!

# The Word Before Work



## LOOKING FOR A GOD AT WORK

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. —**GENESIS 1:1–3**

**I**n the church today, we talk a lot about how God is loving, holy, omnipresent, all-powerful, faithful, just, and true. But we rarely, if ever, talk about the fact that we worship a God who *works*. Yet that is the *very first thing* God revealed about himself in Scripture. In the beginning, God *created*. In the beginning, God was *productive*. In the beginning, God *worked*.

In the first pages of Genesis, we see God working with his words (see chapter 1) and his hands (see 2:7–9). We see him joyfully engaged in “the work of creating” (2:3). It’s significant to note that the Hebrew word *mlkh*, which we translate “work” in this verse, is also used to describe human work throughout the Old Testament.

Every other religion says that the gods created human beings to work and serve the gods. Only the Bible says that God himself worked to serve us. This radical truth is foundational to how we—God’s image bearers—should think about our work today. Work isn’t a necessary evil or a meaningless means to an end. Work is dignified, meaningful, and good in and of itself. More than that, work is Godlike and a way that we reflect his character to those around us. With that in mind, go and lean into your God-ordained work with love and excellence today!



## THORNS AND THISTLES

To Adam [God] said . . . “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food.” —**GENESIS 3:17-19**

**A**fter a particularly frustrating day at the office, it can be tempting to believe that work itself is a curse—a necessary evil and consequence of living in a fallen world. But that’s not at all what Scripture teaches. God himself worked, giving great dignity to our work today. Then he passed the baton of creation to us to work as his image bearers. Genesis 1 and 2 show us that work is inherently dignified and good. Work existed prior to the Fall, and thus, work was designed to be worship.

But—and this is a *big* but—sin messed everything up. As today’s passage reminds us, sin doesn’t just affect our souls and individual standing before God. It affects the whole of creation, including the world of work. Because of sin, our work has become “painful toil” as the “thorns and thistles” of fallen creation make our work frustrating and arduous.

If you have a difficult day at the office today, remember this: Work isn’t hard because it is inherently evil. Work is hard because we still live in a fallen world. But sin didn’t just make work difficult. As we’ll see tomorrow, the Fall also ensured that we’ll be tempted to foolishly look to our work as a means of salvation.



## FISHERMEN AND RELIGIOUS PROFESSIONALS

Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? —**MARK 6:3**

**F**or approximately 80 percent of his adult life, Jesus wasn't preaching. He was working as a carpenter. Given Jesus's ultimate purpose, this truth should stop us in our tracks. God could have placed Jesus in a priestly household like that of John the Baptist or in the home of a Pharisee like Paul. Instead, Jesus grew up in the household of a carpenter, doing work that looked very similar to the work you and I do today.

I think Jesus's vocation is meant to remind us that, even after the Fall, work is still inherently good. I think God is pointing us back to Genesis to remind us that he is a God who creates things for others—just like a carpenter. I think he's saying, "Your work that others call 'secular' is crucial to my kingdom-building project."

Jesus reaffirmed this when he called his disciples. Given that his ministry was about preaching "[the] gospel of the kingdom" (Matthew 24:14), you might expect Jesus to enlist the help of Pharisees and other religious professionals. But instead, he called fishermen and tax collectors.

If you work outside the four walls of a church, be encouraged by Jesus's frequent reminder that your current work can be part of cultivating the kingdom. How? I'll answer that question directly in the third week of this devotional, but first we need to get to the Cross and the rest of the biblical narrative about work.

