The InTransition Workbook/Magazine equips and prepares graduating seniors to transition to post-graduation life and make an impact for Christ in the world.

Single life, finances, life-transitions, the will of God, a theology of work, evangelism in the real world: InTransition addresses all the critical issues of a successful transition from campus—a resource for the last and most neglected phase of campus discipleship.

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If you enjoy feeling a vague and unsettled sense of guilt for not going into “the ministry,” you’re better off not reading this chapter. On the other hand, if going to work each day with a sense of Christ-exalting joy sounds attractive, then maybe you ought to read on. The majority of Christians aren’t in vocational ministry. So if God really cares about all of life, it’s about time we developed a coherent theology of work.

A friend of mine left a well-paying job to join the staff of a Christian ministry. She explained her decision something like this: “Working a normal job, I had to spend 40 or 50 hours a week doing what my employer wanted. Ministry had to come second. But now I’ll be free to devote all my time to God and to ministry.”

I understand what my friend is trying to say. When I first heard her say it in a room full of Christian friends, I nodded along with everyone else. I may even have voiced a barely audible “Mmmm” to show that I resonated with the point. After all, it sounds so … spiritual. And that’s the problem.

Behind this perspective lie some deeply rooted misconceptions about work and spirituality. Without disrespecting my friend and others like her, I want to try and right the ship. I want to show you that work itself is an inherently spiritual thing. And I want you to see that glorifying God in the marketplace goes far beyond witnessing to your coworkers or hosting a Bible study over lunch. You are fulfilling God’s design when you do your job well, no matter what your job is.

When I was a senior in college, I spent a lot of time thinking and praying about what to do next. I spoke with lots of mentors, some who were in “full-time ministry” and some who weren’t. One of the words that got thrown around a lot was the word calling, as in “What is God calling you to do?”

I had a love-hate relationship with this idea of calling. On the one hand, I believed that God actually is a relational being, and so He must call people into certain things. On the other hand, it seemed like the people who were “called” were always the ones in full-time ministry. There seemed to be two classes of Christians: those who did regular work and those who were called into ministry.

After I joined the world of full-time ministry, this classism was reiterated. One of my mentors in campus ministry said he believed ministers had a special calling from God that other people didn’t. I immediately put this idea to work in raising support. I told people, “I know you haven’t been called into vocational ministry, but God has given you the opportunity to support people, like me, who have been!”

It wasn’t until a few years later that someone pointed out to me an interesting fact: the root of the English word vocation is the Latin verb voca, which means “to call.” The linguistic evidence suggests that at some point in history people actually thought of every type of work as a calling. This notion lodged itself in my soul and provoked a wholesale reexamination of my assumptions.
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WORK IS GOOD

The LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowl-
good of evil and evil. . .

Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the gar-
den of Eden to cultivate it and keep it (Genesis 2:7-9, 15).

The most important thing about this passage is that it takes place before the Fall. Work is not a result of sin; it is part of God’s original design for humanity! The word “cultivate” in Genesis 2:15 translates the Hebrew word for word or service. The word “keep” carries the idea of care or protection (compare Psalm 121, where God is called our “keeper”). God put Adam in the Garden of Eden to work it and to care for it.

This truth is right there in the Bible, plain as day. God created you to work. And that’s only the beginning of the story! Adam started out tending a garden, but God had much bigger plans in mind.

God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Genesis 1:27-28)

God’s purpose was for Adam’s dominion over the garden to expand into his dominion over the whole earth. By producing godly offspring and teaching them to work, Adam and Eve were to subdue all of creation. The language of subduing and ruling mirrors what God did in creation, turning chaos into order. Adam and Eve were to turn the whole earth into the Garden of Eden. And it wasn’t going to happen by magic but by concerted effort.

Theologians call Genesis 1:27-28 the cultural mandate. God is mandat-
ing the establishment of culture. Adam and Eve will produce children. Those children will create families, and those families will band together into cities and social networks. Those networks of human beings will reflect all the aspects of human culture—language and art and music and food and philosophy and theology.

It is no accident that the ultimate biblical picture of redeemed humanity involves a city (Revelation 21:2). A city reflects human culture in its most developed and complex forms. God’s purpose for humanity started in a garden, but it culminates in a great cultural center. One of my seminary professors is fond of saying, “God expected Adam and Eve to split the atom.” He didn’t just expect them to have babies and plant trees. They were meant to exercise dominion over all of creation, turning the entire earth into a showcase of the glory and beauty and majesty of God—and then working it and caring for it for all eternity.

So work was God’s design from the beginning. And the ultimate goal was for every aspect of life and culture to be saturated with the beauty and glory and love of God. But when sin entered the picture, the work was cursed. It’s important that we see both the goodness of work in God’s original creation and the struggle of work under the Fall. If we see only the good, we’ll be frustrated when things don’t go as they should. If we see only the bad, we’ll have a hard time doing our work to the glory of God. Work is a curse but it’s still a creation, which is part of God’s goodness, a good work that’s been tainted by the Fall. And God is at work to redeem work.

What are some ways that God can be glorified in our work?

- God is glorified when we put our whole selves into our work, with a view toward pleasing God, not people (Colossians 3:23-24).
- God is glorified when we are honest, even when it hurts us or prevents us from getting ahead (Genesis 39; Psalm 15).
- God is glorified when he honor our superiors and submit to their authority (Romans 13; Ephesians 5:4).
- God is glorified when we treat our work associates with kindness and respect (Luke 6:9; Romans 12:10).
- God is glorified when we expose fraud or dishonesty or unethical behavior (Ephesians 5:11-13).
- God is glorified when we approach our work prayerfully (1 Thessalonians 5:17).
- God is glorified when we avoid complaining or grumbling, even in less than ideal work situations (Philippians 2:14-15).
- God is glorified when we refuse to make work and money our idols (Ecclesiastes 5:10-12; Matthew 6:24).
- God is glorified when we plan diligently for the future (Proverbs 21:5).
- God is glorified when we live simply and give generously (Proverbs 22:9; 1 Timothy 6:17-18).
- God is glorified when we trust Him to provide today what we need for today (Matthew 6:11).
- God is glorified when we rest from work (Deuteronomy 5:13-15; Psalm 46:10).

Redemption is not just about individual souls; it’s about the restoration of the entire cosmos. Romans 8:20-21 says, “The creation was subjected to frustration … in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to death and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God” (NIV). Through us, God wants to renew creation.

When God redeems us in Christ, He doesn’t just change our eternal des-
tiny. He changes our whole worldview, our entire basis for living, the grid through which we see all of life. Redemption affects every part of us. And through us, God’s redemption is extended into the world around us.

So redemption in Christ must transform our view of work. No longer is work a necessary evil; now it is a calling. Work has great spiritual significance because it is a chance for God to be glorified. Remember 1 Corinthians 10:31: “Whether … you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” A similar command is given in Colossians 3:17: “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” When you show up at your job, you’re there for the glory of God. God wants to be hon-
ored in what you do and in how you do it.

To straighten out our malformulated theology of work, we need to go all the way back to the Garden of Eden.

In all these ways and many more, we can do our work to the glory of God.

Consider these biblical ideas:

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To straighten out our malformed theology of work, we need to go all the way up with work for what it gets us. So God may be glorified in the here and now, not just in heaven. We are still using work as a means to an end. We are putting forth our sweat and toil to exercise dominion over creation, not to preserve and subdue it as God intended. We are pursuing holier ends: money to tithe or an opportunity to witness to others, a new house, a beer money or a fat retirement pension or a better life for one’s kids. The glory of God must inform and transform our view of work itself.

The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being. The Lord God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden, and there he placed the man whom He had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowl-

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WHAT NOW?

Now would be a good time to stop.

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way-too-happy Christians who go to work thinking that since they love

First, work hard. Go to work tomorrow or next month or next year and
do your absolute best. Be the best employee, the best manager, the
best associate you can be. Be known as the most honest, most humble,
most ethical, most competent person in your field. And do all that, not
to advance your own career, but to advance God's fame.

Fourth, learn to pray the Lord's Prayer. There's a reason Jesus taught
disciples to "pray in this way." Jesus, the master teacher, knew that
we become what we pray. When our prayers focus on our needs and
our agendas and the ways we want God to bless us, we become self-
centered, myopic people. To save us from this, Jesus gave us a pattern
for prayer that causes us to begin to care about the Father's name, the
Father's kingdom, the Father's will. And we begin to see that work,
like all of life, is not us. So get yourself into the discipline of
praying the Lord's Prayer before work and after work and during
work, not to get God to do something for you, but to get yourself into
a God-centered rhythm of life.

Thus far, I've tried to sketch a broad biblical theology of work. It's my
prayer that as you reflect on these things, God will grip you with the
deep spirituality of work and give you a broader vision for His glory in
your vocation. On the other hand, sometimes you just need some good
practical advice. At some point (usually about now), you're going to
ask the question "How should all this change what I do tomorrow?" Here are my four best answers.

1.  What can we learn about work from the book of Genesis?
2.  What does it mean to be called? What is a calling?
3.  How is work redeemed?
4.  What are some ways we can glorify God in our work?
5.  What makes work good and not a necessary evil?
6.  What motivates you the most when you think about how you could glorify God through your job?
7.  Do you think there is a difference in the call to a specific job and the call to missions? If so, why?

Bob Thune has been called by God to lead the Coram Deo Church Community in Omaha, Nebraska. In the past, he has also been called by God to be a car wash attendant, a security guard, a recruiter, a political campaign worker, a used car salesman, a fund raiser, a campus minister, and a writer. He currently lives in Omaha with his wife, Leigh, and their three children.
Rest is a deeply spiritual thing. And God intends it to be a regular part of the weekly rhythm of your life. He commands it, the same way He commands you to make disciples and worship God alone and love your neighbor as yourself. You need to get serious about this commandment. Maybe you even need to get legalistic for a while, just to get yourself in the habit of observing it.

Most of us are so used to music and TV and e-mail and social interaction and recreation and conversations and busyness that we have forgotten the art of resting. The best thing you can do for yourself, for your employer, for your career, and for the glory of God is to set aside one day in your week when you can't be reached. Turn your cell phone off. Don't check your e-mail. Take a really long nap. Worship with other believers. Take a walk or watch a sunset or read a good book.

If your work obligations don't permit a 24-hour period of rest every week, then consider taking a personal day every month for solitude and silence and rest. Why wouldn't you? Your coworkers will take personal days when a pet dies or when a girlfriend breaks up with them or when they are hung over from a long weekend. Are you really going to feel guilty for taking one day out of every 30 to refresh your soul through intimate communion with the God of the universe? I hope not.

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If you desperately want to see all of your coworkers saved, but you have a habit of not showing up to work on time, people will be annoyed and your witness will be compromised and God will not be honored. There are already enough people like that. Don’t be one of them.

Second, don’t expect life at work to be ‘peachy.’ We all know the tensions with your boss or your coworkers. These things don’t mean that Jesus doesn’t love you or that God isn’t on your side or that God is punishing you for that one time you got drunk when you were a fresh- man. Rather, they are the inevitable result of living in a fallen world. Remember: thorns and thistles. Work is cursed. Work is affected by the Fall. Work doesn’t always go the way it should. So have a God-sized view of the holiness of work (creation). But be realistic about the Fall, too. Jesus hasn’t come back yet.

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