

EVERY GOOD ENDEAVOUR

STUDY GUIDE

One – The Design of Work

In the beginning God created work (p 33 and Genesis 2: 1-3 and 15). The forms of God's work are to create, care (also known as "providence") and commission workers (p 35). We also see the goodness of God's work, p 36, "*Work is as much a basic human need as food, beauty, rest, friendship, prayer and sexuality; it is not simply medicine but food for our soul. Without meaningful work we sense significant inner loss and emptiness.*"

The key point here is that work is meaningful.

Freedom in my work, p 38, "*Freedom is not so much the absence of restrictions as finding the right ones, those that fit with the realities of our own nature and those of the world.*" It is therefore incumbent on us to follow the "Maker's" instructions and follow the principle of rhythm and rest (p 39).

Discussion Question

What are some ways that I can find meaning in my work?

Think about how my work is a benefit to myself or others. How does my work contribute to my community?

Discussion Question

What are some good and godly restraints built into my work?

A restraint is something that prevents me from being harmed or taken advantage of. These could be particular to my industry, or the types of work practices that are legislated as a basic right or could be related to practices in my particular workplace.

Two – The Dignity of Work

This is the opposite to the ancient Greek idea that work is a curse (p45). The ancient Greeks saw work as a barrier to the highest form of life and not all work was created as equal. For instance, work that required the mind rather than the body was more noble (p 46).

The following are some points that Keller makes about work:

- Work is a necessary evil
- Low paid work is an assault on our dignity
- I should aim for high paid work regardless of my gifts or temperament
- Distinctions are made between knowledge work and service work
- People may choose to be unemployed rather than doing work beneath them

It is key to understand that the Bible does not portray the material world as evil! (pp 51 - 53)

Discussion Question

What are some vestiges of ancient Greek thinking that influence our concepts of work?

Think about the Australian culture and how we view work. Do we give equal value to all types of work? Is work seen as a necessary evil?

Discussion Question

How does the Bible in Genesis portray the work that God gives humans?

What does God command humans to do? What does this suggest about the inherent dignity of the work we do? Consider the anecdote on pages 50-51 about Mike the doorman.

Three – Work as Cultivation

Humans are commanded to fill and subdue the earth (Genesis 1: 28; p 55). The concept of "subduing the earth" has at times been used by some critics of the Bible as a pre-text for developed cultures recklessly exploiting the earth's resources.

However Keller states, *"...there is no violent intent to subduing the earth. Instead, ruling the world as God's image bearers should be seen as stewardship or trusteeship. God owns the earth, but he has put it under our care to cultivate it. It is definitely not a mandate to treat the world and its resources as they are ours to use, exploit and discard as we wish...So the word subdue indicates that even in its original, unfallen form God made the world to need work"* (pp 56-57).

Keller states that all work is culture making with God, *"So we are not to relate to the world as park rangers, whose job is not to change their space, but to preserve things as they are. Nor are we to pave over the garden of the created world to make a parking lot. No, we are to be gardeners who take an active stance toward all they change. They do not leave the land as it is"* (p 58).

Discussion Question

What do you think of Keller's statement about humans subduing the earth?

Do you think that our work is to subdue the earth in the sense that he discusses? Is there a danger of giving license to exploitation?

Discussion Question

What do you think about humans being called to be gardeners rather than park rangers in this context?

Does his view cancel out the good done to preserve pristine areas of natural habitats? Do you think he wants us to be “gardeners” more than “park rangers” or “builders”? What is the point he is making about cultivation?

Four – Work as Service

Work is a means of serving God and our neighbour. This speaks to the motivation for my work, freeing me from the potential to being enslaved by work as a means of self-promotion and self-glory.

"We are not to choose jobs and conduct our work to fulfil ourselves and accrue power, for being called by God to do something is empowering enough. We are to see work as a way of service to God and our neighbour, and so we should both choose and conduct our work in accordance with that purpose" (p 67).

I need to see work as an act of love. I value the work I do for the inherent value of the work itself, not because of what I can get out of it by way of money or status (p 74, Dorothy Sayers).

"The differences between a wilderness and a culture is simply work" (DeKoster, p 75).

I also need to see work as a ministry of competence, *"Competence is a basic value. It is not a means to an end, such as wealth or position, although such results may occur"* (p 79).

Discussion Question

What do you think is a Christian view of calling?

Refer to the quote by Martin Luther on pages 68-69. Can I truly believe that God calls me to being an administrator or a truck driver as much as he might call me to being a pastor or a missionary?

Discussion Question

How does an understanding of the Gospel and in particular, the doctrine of justification by faith, shape my understanding of the value of work in God's eyes?

Refer to pages 72-73. Because I cannot work to earn favour with God can I truly say that there is essentially "more" godly or spiritual work which will earn greater merit with him?

Discussion Question

What do you think of the proposition that Christian work is basically work well done?

If this is true, what does this mean about "good work" done by non Christians? Is there anything intrinsically different to a job well done by a Christian compared with a job well done by a non Christian?

Five – Work becomes Fruitless

Thinking about the Fall - Paradise Lost: *"When Adam and Eve disobeyed this command, they became "like God", as the serpent (who deceived them into disobedience) said they would. That is they put themselves in God's place; they took upon themselves the right to decide how they should live and what was right and wrong for them to do" (p 85).*

Things fall apart. Since sin enters into the world God's original design is marred and we suffer disastrous consequences. *"Genesis 3 shows how sin warps every part of our nature, every aspect of human living. It begins by distorting the areas of sex, gender, love and marriage. God chillingly explains the impact of sin on the relationship between husbands and wives...The very fabric of the physical world now began to unravel" (pp 87-88).*

We now straddle a reality somewhere between God's intention for work being a means of creational flourishing to being a means of frustration and pain. *"Because of the nature of God's creation, we work for our happiness. And because of God's intentions for our work - to contribute to the flourishing of the world - we have glimpses of what we could accomplish. But because of the fall of the human race,*

our work is also profoundly frustrating, never as fruitful as we want, and often a complete failure" (p 95).

In light of these realities, we need grace to prevent from being cynical on the one hand or naive on the other hand.

**Our hope therefore is in the resurrection,
when Christ will renew all things!**

Discussion Question

How does sin "not only affect personal and private life, but also social life and, in particular, work?"

Refer to page 89.

Discussion Question

Where have you experienced frustration in your work?

Refer to the scenario on page 91. Can you relate to this? What do you think Keller is trying to show by this scenario?

Discussion Question

What was Salieri's basic problem?

Refer to pages 92 – 95.

Six – Work becomes Pointless

The narrator in Ecclesiastes sees all of life as meaningless, futile and vain because he has tried to find meaning through the pursuit of:

- Wisdom and learning
- Pleasure
- Hard work

But none of these bring him satisfaction. Even work by itself does not produce a meaningful life, because ultimately its effects will be wiped away (p 102).

So, how does work become pointless?

It alienates us from God and from others (p 103). We are alienated from God when he does not give us what we have sought from work. We think we make deals with God that he doesn't keep!

We also experience the danger of choice (p 106). Historically we have more choice than any other cultures to choose vocational paths, yet rather than engendering mass satisfaction and fulfilment, we are often left feeling anxious and unhappy by our work choices.

Discussion Question

In what ways does Ecclesiastes shine the light on the alienating effects of work?

How can my ambitions isolate me from others? What are some of the injustices inherent in the social systems of my work that create alienation in my community and in other communities?

Discussion Question

How can range of choice in career be a danger in our modern culture?

Think of why I chose my given career. What made my choice/s attractive?

Seven – Work becomes Selfish

The story of the building of the tower of Babel reveals humanity's desire to make a name for itself (pp 113-114). Here collective endeavour is used as a means to defy God. But all that I have has been given to me so that I serve God and my neighbour, not to make a great name for myself.

Keller speaks of the Esther as an example of someone who is placed in a position of power (pp 118-121). For the Christian this leads to the necessary question of asking why I am in the place that God has placed me.

There is both peril and opportunity in being in the "palace", *"unless you use your clout, your credentials, and your money in service to the people outside the palace, the palace is a prison; it has already given you your name"* (p 123).

Discussion Question

Can your position become a prison rather than a palace?

In 2008, Sydney journalist, Lisa Pryor published a book called "The Pin Striped Prison - How Overachievers Get Trapped in Corporate Jobs They Hate." In it she contends that our social system conditions us to aspire for careers that underline power, financial success and status, especially if we are high academic achievers. The measure of success is often seen in being fast-tracked on a corporate career that many would not have chosen had there not been a cultural expectation to do so. She concludes that corporate careers for these people becomes little better than being in a prison from which they cannot escape.

Is this assessment fair of Australian culture? If so, think about this dynamic and how as a Christian you can be counter-cultural to this trend.

Discussion Question

How did Esther save her people?

Keller believes that she did so by identification and mediation (p 126). But what does this mean, especially for you as a Christian in your context?

Eight – Work reveals our Idols

Idols are persuasive and powerful!

An idol is anything to which I bow down that is not God (p 131).

Another way to look at an idol can be a good thing, which I turn into an ultimate thing. But, there is **only one who is ultimate!**

"Luther came to realise that these two ideas - to set up an idol and to try and save yourself through your own efforts - are describing essentially the same thing" (pp 132-3).

Idolatry reveals so much about me and what is important in my life.

"Idolatry has power over our actions because it has power over our hearts" (p 134).

Cultural and Corporate Idols

These are the **idols of traditional culture**, *"such cultures teach their members that their lives have meaning if they assume and are faithful to their duties and roles within the community - as sons and daughters, as fathers and mothers, and as members of their tribe and nation. In such cultures, family, race and nation can become dangerously paramount" (p 138).*

Traditional cultures esteem loyalty and social stability over and above the rights of the individual.

There are also the **idols of modern culture**, where the idols of religion, tribe and tradition have been replaced by "*reason, empiricism and individual freedom as the ultimate values*" (p 140).

Here scientific evidence and the rights of the individual become "god", so that in modern societies our work serves our self-interest (p 142) and becomes a means of self-realisation. But there is also an inherent contradiction through Frederick Taylor's philosophy of mechanisation and mass production which has exalted efficiency over humanity and individuality in our work (pp 142-3).

Finally, there are the **idols of post modern cultures**, which rebuts the idea that science by itself leads to a better world and also exposes the contradiction that there are no moral absolutes while respecting individual freedom and human dignity.

Here technology, uncertainty and the market have become the idols with individual competition for personal success and power (p 146) and society is marked by fragmentation (p 147). The implications are that cynicism, personal ambition and self rule.

But, **there is hope** in the alternate story line of the Gospel, which places work in partnership with God, gives me a new moral compass and radically changes my motives for work with a new and durable inner power.

Discussion Question

Can work become my saviour?

How can this show itself in my life? From what am I seeking salvation?

Discussion Question

What are the transcendent values espoused in your culture?

These are the "holy and unassailable" values "promoted with religious fervour and passion" (p 137).

Discussion Question

What do you think of Keller's assessment of cultural idols?

Is he too pessimistic of our post modern culture? For instance, are there not examples of non-Christians who work for the common good? If you can think of examples of non-Christians working for the common good, what do you think this means? How would you interpret this?

Nine – A New Story for Work

We all make meaning of life, primarily through stories. Essentially a story describes a problem with the idea of things that need to be resolved.

A worldview is a way of looking at the world and making sense of our story through the lens of a bigger story. "*Worldview means the comprehensive perspective from which we interpret all of reality*" (p 157). This comprehensive story tells us:

- What human life in the world should be like (how things are supposed to be)
- What has knocked the world off balance (what is wrong)
- What can be done to make it right (what is the solution)

Key: Worldviews are not private or unique (p 158)

In fact, our workplace becomes one of the principal places where we live out our personal and social narrative. Our worldview is seen by the way we think, act and relate to others.

The Gospel and Other Worldviews

The Gospel story is primarily about our broken relationship with God and what God has done to repair it. Other worldviews will propose different issues at the heart of what is wrong with the world and what should be done to fix it. Some examples of these are Plato's idea that the spirit is trapped in the body or Marx's idea that the working classes are oppressed by the ruling classes.

However, the Christian worldview is centred around the trichotomy of creation (the world that God made was originally good), the fall (the world suffered the entrance of disruptive evil) and redemption (the world will one day be redeemed) (pp 162-3).

The Gospel and Business

"To be a Christian in business, then means much more than just being honest or not sleeping with your coworkers...it means thinking out the implications of the gospel worldview and God's purposes for your whole work life" (pp 168-9).

The Gospel and Journalism

In this field of endeavour the temptation is to portray stories of heroes and villains without exploring the nuances of truth. One way of addressing journalism is through understanding the tendency in our fallen world to either idolise or demonise people or structures. How does the Gospel speak into this?

The Gospel and Higher Education

Living in a post-enlightenment world knowledge has become a matter of scientific verification, which recasts the way we approach the teaching of the humanities. The teaching of wisdom and reflective capacities seem to be relegated to a secondary realm. How does the Gospel speak into our understanding of knowledge and wisdom and how it should be taught in our communities?

The Gospel and the Arts

The arts are often a clear window into our culture. How does a casting of the Gospel story enable us to shape a picture that provides hope and meaning?

The Gospel and Medicine

Keller outlines the temptation of being lost in one's profession, leading to the irony of those in the helping professions being tempted toward superiority. Yet the opportunities to enter into people's lives and minister to people is also tremendous.

The Christian Worldview Shapes all Work

A Christian worldview at work is more than speaking about Christian teaching or "looking" a certain way in our work. Rather, think of the Gospel as a "set of glasses through which you 'look' at everything else in the world" (p 180).

Discussion Question

Write down three or four of the key beliefs and attitudes that you believe are at the heart of a Christian worldview. Looking at your life in the past week, do you think these things have shaped your thoughts, words and actions?

J. Mark Bertrand in his book, "Rethinking Worldview", says that a worldview starts from the way we interpret the things that happen in our life. He says, "*you search for meaning, or at least for patterns, in what has taken place. You begin to draw conclusions about the way that the world works.*" What do your conclusions tell you about yourself and what you believe about God and the world in which you live?

Discussion Question

What is the story line of the culture in which you live and the field in which you work? Who are the protagonists and the antagonists.

A good way of understanding your culture is through "popculture". What are we singing about? Who are our heroes and villains? What

are the taboo beliefs and practices? In thinking about your industry, what are some of the jokes you hear about those who are in your profession or industry? This will probably tell you a lot about prevailing culture.

Discussion Question

Review the questions on page 181 and reflect on each of these in relation to your own situation.

In particular, think about the stories that affect the form and content of my work personally. Think about those things that have shaped my worldview such as my family of origins, my peers while I was growing up, my current relationships, my experiences, my disappointments and triumphs. How have these things affected my living out a Christian worldview where I work?

Ten – A New Conception of Work

Everyone participates in God's work. God continues to be at work through his providence, nurturing and sustaining all that he has created. Because all people are created in God's image, albeit marred by the fall, *"we should not be surprised that many people without belief in Jesus can do great work - even better work - than Christians."*

The balance of Common Grace. The Bible teaches that God is known by all people, even if the knowledge is not a "saving" knowledge (see Romans 1 & 2 and Psalm 19). This is known as "natural revelation". Furthermore, the teaching of Common Grace tells us that people are able to act for the common good of the wider community because they retain the image of God and through the restraining work of the Holy Spirit to subdue evil. This means that our communities can be orderly, progressive and work for the common good of all.

The freedom of Common Grace. *"...without an understanding of common grace, Christians will have trouble understanding why non Christians so often exceed Christians morally and in wisdom"* (p 191).

The dialogue of Popular Culture. It seems that Christians have disengaged from popular culture because of a thin view of sin and a

thin view of common grace. A thin view of sin sees sin as a discrete set of acts of non-compliance to God's law (p 193). The problem with this view is that it sees sin as only surface deep and concerned primarily with behaviour. A thin view of common grace fails to appreciate the work of the Holy Spirit in promoting the "common good" through the actions of non-Christians (pp 194-5).

Dualism vs Integration. Dualism = separating the sacred from the secular (p 196). Common mistakes are that Christian work is narrowly defined either in spiritual exercises or activities done in a church or para-church context. **The integration of faith and work is the opposite of dualism.**

"Because Christians are never as good as their right beliefs should make them and non-Christians are never as bad as their wrong beliefs should make them, we will adopt a stance of critical enjoyment of human culture and its expressions in every field of work. We will learn to recognise the half truths and resist the idols; and we will learn to recognise and celebrate the glimpses of justice, wisdom, truth and beauty we find around us in all aspects of life" (p 197).

Discussion Question

What does the teaching of common grace tell us about the value of non-Christians' work?

Think about how the image of God is still seen in the work and activities of non-Christians.

Discussion Question

Discuss dualism vs integration

To what extent do you think that you have maintained a dualism in your life? What do you typically think of when you hear the term, 'serving God'? What kinds of things constitute serving God?

Discussion Question

What are the implications of having a thin view of sin and a thin view of common grace?

Consider what the Bible teaches about sin, for instance Jesus says in Matthew 12:35, *"A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil*

stored up in him." What does this suggest about the origins and outworking of sin? Think of other parts of Scripture that might help you understand sin as a dynamic rather than an act.

On the other hand, think also about the good things that non-Christians practice in their lives. Even though Jesus told his hearers in the Sermon on the Mount that they were evil, they still knew how to give good gifts to their children (Matt 7:11) and show love to those who loved them (Matt 5:46). Think of other parts of Scripture that demonstrate the image of God working itself out in humanity.

Eleven – A New Compass for Work

The limitation of ethics. Modern ethics seems to have boiled down to becoming a matter of cost/benefit analysis. So, if a matter is legal, the question becomes will it be good for business and if integrity is good for business I need to show integrity in my business practices. However, such an ethical basis is likely to fall over at some point. The problem is that professional ethics have a cumulative effect reinforcing practices that have either a good or bad impact on the common good. Individual choices need to be seen in the light of how they impact the wider community, not simply the individual making them.

A different set of values. Love is the foundational principle in our values. *"Love, then, occupies a supreme place in the Christian imagination. As Jesus says, to be fully human boils down to loving God and loving our neighbour"* (p 206).

A different view of humanity. Christianity is the only stable basis for honouring human rights, based on the doctrine of humans being created in the image of God (p 207).

A different source for guidance. Wisdom is called for as the means of knowing what to do in most cases (p 210). Wisdom teaches us to know God, know ourselves and to learn from our experiences.

A different audience. Keller discusses Ephesians 6: 5 - 9 and looks at the implications for both employees and employers. Our primary audience is God and our behaviour is borne from a knowledge of who we and to whom we are ultimately accountable (p 218).

The orientation of a new compass. Here is an ethical compass for Christians that enables us to navigate the world of work between the values of:

- not being ruthless
- being generous
- remaining calm or poised in the face of difficulty or failure
- not being sectarian

Christian ethics in your vocation. Christians need to ask the larger questions about their vocation or field of work. Consider how to:

- uphold the primacy of human relationships
- think of the consequences of decisions and changes
- think of the long term benefits
- not commodify every decision

Discussion Question

What are some ways in which I can apply Christian ethics in my field of work or workplace even if people don't share my beliefs in the Gospel?

Think of some of the things Keller talks about in building his framework for ethics. How do I apply love in my field of work? Can I construct a compass that even non Christians will accept? What are some of the boundaries I can work within in my cooperation with those who are not Christian?

Discussion Question

Why is it important to consider a broader approach to ethics in my field of work?

What are the limitations of a cost/benefit analysis? Why is a consideration of what is legal and what is not legal a limited view to decision making in my field of work? What are some practical issues you have faced where you have wrestled with principles and values that others seem to have ignored?

Discussion Question

How does having God as my principal audience affect my approach to work?

As an employer or manager what preoccupies me in my work? As an employee how do I relate to those with authority over me? Are there ways that I can become more conscious of God in my thinking, speaking and decision-making? What are some of these ways?

Twelve – New Power for Work

The work under the work. What animates me in my work? While work is a gift from God, the problem with it is that I can be trying to build my worth, security and meaning out of it?

The power of true passion. Consider the ideas behind acedia:

"Acedia is the sin which believes in nothing, cares for nothing, enjoys nothing, lives for nothing and only remains alive because there is nothing for which it will die. We have known it far too well for many years, the only thing perhaps we have not known about it is it is a mortal sin" (Dorothy Sayers, p 229). The person characterised by acedia does not necessarily look lazy, but is rather guilty of the sin of the "empty soul." Keller goes on to give the example of the ring of power from the Lord of the Rings, which is a picture of *"magnifying the self-serving nature of sin in every human heart"* (p 231). But the power of true passion comes from a heart that works from a place of self denying love, not selfish drive. *"So we are asked to bring emotion, discipline, and urgency to the task of being living sacrifices in the lives we lead and the work we do"* (p 232).

The power of deep rest. *"All of us are haunted by the work under the work - the need to prove and save ourselves, to gain a sense of*

worth and identity. But if we can experience gospel rest in our hearts, if we can be free from the need to earn our salvation through our work, we will have a deep reservoir of refreshment that continually rejuvenates us, restores our perspective and renews our passion" (p 234).

The rest under the rest. True rest comes in giving our burden to Jesus and taking up his yoke as he walks alongside us. By finding this rest I can also find God's pleasure, like the English athlete, Eric Liddell, who could say, "when I run, I feel God's pleasure."

"You can work with passion and rest, knowing that ultimately the deepest desires of your heart - including your specific aspirations for your earthly work - will be fulfilled when you reach your true country, the new heavens and the new earth" (p 241).

Discussion Question

What animates me in my work?

How telling is Keller's probe that I am building my worth, security and meaning through my work? Is his assessment of motivations realistic in your world where you need to be committed to your work?

Discussion Question

What does a living sacrifice suggest in relation to my work?

Think about the deception of acedia that can drive me to be very animated about my work, but leads me in a direction of self-serving. Is Keller perhaps over-thinking this or is this a very real danger in my work?

Discussion Question

What will resting in Jesus look like in my work?

Think of some single words that might describe the situation. What would others see in me? Think of some changes that would occur in your workplace relationships. Would anything change about my life now?