

Chapter 10

Work Without Worshiping Work

For most men, work occupies an enormous share of adult life. Add commuting, travel, after-hours phone calls, preparation for tomorrow, and the problems that follow us home even when our bodies have left the workplace, and work becomes much more than a single category among many. It becomes one of the primary environments in which we live.

That is not necessarily a problem. Work can be deeply satisfying, and Scripture does not treat productive effort as an unfortunate interruption between the parts of life that truly matter. There is value in solving difficult problems, building something useful, serving a customer well, completing a project, developing expertise, leading people responsibly, and providing for a family. Work gives structure to our days and offers opportunities to use abilities developed over years.

For many men, work also gives us a place where we know how to be useful. We understand the problems, know the language, recognize the expectations, and have accumulated enough experience that people come to us because we know what to do. That can make retirement more complicated than a financial calculation suggests. We may look forward to greater freedom while quietly wondering what will happen when no one needs us to do what we have spent forty years learning to do.

Leaving a job can change our routines, relationships, responsibilities, authority, recognition, and sense of usefulness almost simultaneously. Some men experience that transition as freedom. Others discover attachments they had not recognized. Still others lose their jobs before they are ready, or continue working because the income remains necessary. Our circumstances differ, but the question beneath them is shared: what place should work have in the life God has entrusted to us now?

Work Was Part of God's Design

Christians sometimes speak of work as if it exists primarily because the world is broken. This misunderstanding is understandable. Difficult bosses, unreasonable customers, exhaustion, layoffs, unfairness, and failed projects remind us that our work takes place in a fallen world. Yet work itself existed before the fall. God placed Adam in the garden “to cultivate it and tend it” (Genesis 2:15, NASB 2020). Productive responsibility was part of human life before sin entered the story.

Genesis 3:17–19 describes the painful toil, the ground's resistance, and the sweat that would mark Adam's life after disobedience. Work became difficult in a new way, but it did not become meaningless. We can acknowledge the frustrations of our working lives without treating all work as something to be escaped in order to live a good life.

That distinction matters when we consider retirement. Paid employment is one setting for worthwhile work, but contribution is much broader. A man can leave a company and continue serving his family, church, or community. Another can remain in paid employment well into later life and serve faithfully. Neither choice is inherently more spiritual. We are asking what love and responsibility look like in the season ahead.

As we established in the previous chapter, a person's worth does not depend on the ability to contribute. Illness or disability may make work impossible. The goodness of work must never become an accusation against the man who cannot do it. We receive work as a gift and a responsibility when capacity and opportunity allow, and we receive rest and care without having to earn our place among the people of God.

A Job Is Not the Same as Work

It helps to distinguish several ideas we often use interchangeably. A job is a specific arrangement in which we perform work, usually for compensation. A career is the broader professional journey that may span several jobs and decades of experience. Work extends beyond both, because valuable effort also occurs outside paid employment. Caring for a spouse, repairing something for a neighbor, serving in a church, or teaching a grandchild can all be meaningful work, even without a paycheck.

Calling is even broader. For the Christian, our fundamental calling is to belong to Jesus Christ and live under His lordship. Within that calling, we undertake different responsibilities in different seasons. We can speak of those responsibilities as assignments without assuming that every job is permanent or that we must discover a hidden occupation before we can obey God. Often, the next step becomes clearer through prayer, wise counsel, honest attention to our obligations, and the opportunities before us.

These distinctions create freedom. A job can end without our belonging to Christ changing. A career can conclude while opportunities to love and serve continue. If physical capacity narrows, the form of our participation may change again. Retirement need not mean that purpose disappears, and continued employment need not mean that we have failed to enter a supposedly more spiritual season.

Some readers have already left their careers. Others have never had a single professional path, moving among jobs, caring for family, or working wherever income was available. This chapter is for you, too. The issue is the relationship you have with work, whether paid or unpaid, and how that relationship serves the life God has given you.

When Good Work Becomes Too Important

Because work is good, we can justify giving it more of ourselves than it deserves. This is especially true for men who believe that working hard is part of loving their families. Often it is. Keeping commitments matters. Customers and employees deserve responsible leadership, and employers deserve honest work. Providing for a household is a serious responsibility.

Yet a good responsibility can gradually take a place it was never meant to hold. A man may call his long hours diligence while work becomes the primary source of his identity. He may sincerely say he is sacrificing for his family while consistently giving that family the tired remainder of himself. He may continue pursuing higher income long after the additional money no longer justifies the cost of that pursuit.

We need to distinguish that pattern from a season of genuine necessity. Long hours may reflect a demanding obligation, financial hardship, or circumstances a man cannot quickly change. The question is not whether his schedule looks ideal from the outside. It is whether he is examining his choices, seeking help when needed, and telling himself the truth about why he works as he does.

This is why we considered enough before arriving here. If there is no such thing as enough, work can always make a convincing case for another hour. There will always be another customer, another opportunity, another problem, or another level of income. We need some understanding of what our work is meant to support, or its demands will keep defining the answer for us.

Work is particularly persuasive because it yields visible results. We can measure sales, projects, promotions, production, and profit. Relationships rarely offer the same immediate feedback. There is no quarterly report showing the return on an uninterrupted evening with your wife, no commission statement showing the value of listening to an adult child, and no professional award for quietly helping a younger person learn something you spent decades understanding. The absence of measurement does not imply the absence of value.

Jesus Knew What His Work Was For

Mark records an occasion when Jesus healed many people and drew considerable attention. Early the next morning, He went to a secluded place to pray. Simon and his companions searched for Him and said, “Everyone is looking for You” (Mark 1:37, NASB 2020). Jesus responded that they would go to nearby towns so He could preach there as well, explaining that this was why He had come (Mark 1:32–39).

The passage shows Jesus continuing His mission beyond the immediate demands of that place. His preaching purpose shaped His next step. We should first receive this account as a description of His

ministry rather than turning it into a technique for managing a crowded calendar. It nevertheless invites us to examine whether demand alone has become the authority governing our decisions.

Being needed can feel very much like being valuable. When people seek our judgment or rely on us to solve difficult problems, the experience can reinforce our sense of significance. There is nothing wrong with taking satisfaction in useful work. The danger arises when we continually need others to confirm that we matter and treat their dependence as something to protect.

We do not have Jesus' perfect knowledge of His mission. We can, however, bring our motives and decisions under His lordship. Before accepting another responsibility, we can ask whether it is ours, how it will affect our existing commitments, and whether our desire to be needed is driving the decision. Faithfulness includes honoring obligations already accepted and discerning which new requests to accept.

Watching Someone Else Become Good at What You Do

One of the more humbling experiences of professional aging is watching others become capable of doing what we once did. At first, we may be the ones teaching them. Over time, some become exceptionally skilled. Technology evolves, methods improve, and someone else may learn a new system faster than we do. The experience can feel threatening if we have built our identity around being indispensable.

It can also be deeply satisfying. There comes a point in many careers when an important part of our contribution is helping others do the work well. Years of experience have shaped judgment that is difficult to convey in a manual alone. We recognize patterns, remember which shortcuts proved costly, and understand why a seemingly simple decision may require more care. Someone learning the work may benefit from that judgment while bringing abilities and insights we can learn from in return.

This creates an opportunity for multiplication. It requires humility because another person may receive credit for work we helped make possible. If we need to remain the most important person in the room, developing a successor can feel threatening. If our identity is secure in Christ, we can welcome another person's growth and give thanks for the role we were allowed to play.

The second half of a career can shift from protecting territory to preparing people. That does not require a management title or an appointed successor. You may help a coworker understand a difficult process, show someone how to handle a customer fairly, or explain a mistake that taught you to exercise better judgment. Ordinary acts of patient teaching can leave people stronger long after your role has changed.

Retirement and the Season Before You

After decades of work, there can be legitimate reasons to leave full-time employment. Health may require it, a spouse may need more attention, or a slower pace may be appropriate after years of demanding responsibility. Rest is not unspiritual, and leisure need not be justified by turning it into another form of productivity. God gives us good things to enjoy.

Rest was part of God's design from the beginning. Genesis records that God rested on the seventh day and blessed it (Genesis 2:2–3), and He built a weekly day of rest into Israel's life (Exodus 20:8–11). Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27, NASB 2020). Christians differ on how the Sabbath command applies under the new covenant, but the pattern itself is a gift: regular rest reminds us that the world is sustained by God, not by our effort. A man who never learned to stop for a day may find retirement disorienting for exactly that reason. Practicing rest now, whatever our employment, is part of learning that our worth does not depend on our output.

There is no single Christian retirement plan that fits everyone. Some men can choose when to leave paid employment, while others need the income, face unexpected job loss, or become caregivers. We should not assume that every reader has a comfortable range of options or that staying employed indicates an unhealthy attachment. Financial responsibilities and practical limits deserve honest attention.

When there is room to choose, it helps to ask both what we are leaving behind and what we hope the change will make possible. Retirement may create time for marriage, family, church, or community. It may allow a season of recovery before any new commitment is considered. Someone else may reduce hours, leave management, or continue working in a role they enjoy and excel at. The goal is to respond faithfully to the circumstances before us, with care for the people who share the consequences.

Our motives deserve attention, no matter which direction we lean. A man may fear leaving because he cannot imagine who he will be without authority or recognition. Another may imagine retirement as a permanent release from all claims of love and responsibility. Neither fear nor comfort should govern the remaining years. At the same time, grieving the loss of work is not idolatry, and needing a substantial period of rest is not evidence of selfishness.

Chapter 3 gives us a foundation for these decisions: an assignment can change without altering our identity in Christ. That truth allows us to remain when staying is faithful and to leave when leaving is wise. It also sustains us when a decision is made for us. A dismissal, a business failure, or an illness may end a role without giving us the closure we hoped for. We can grieve that loss, seek practical help, and take the next step without treating an unfinished career as an unfinished identity.

Work Under the Order of Jesus

Jesus > Others > Self changes the questions we bring to work. Compensation still matters because financial obligations are real. Excellence still matters because people deserve careful, honest effort. Advancement may be appropriate, but none of those things takes precedence or gives us permission to use people in pursuit of success.

Paul gave this instruction to believers who had little control over their working conditions:

“Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord and not for people, knowing that it is from the Lord that you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.” — Colossians 3:23–24 (NASB 2020)

That changes whom we are finally working for. A supervisor may overlook good work, and a customer may never know what it cost. The Lord sees it. The same truth frees us from needing the workplace to provide our reward.

We begin by asking whether our conduct reflects the character of Christ. Do we treat people with dignity? Are we honest even when it costs us? Does our leadership help others grow? Does professional success increase our capacity for generosity or simply our appetite for more? The answers concern everyday behavior as much as major career decisions.

Love for others extends beyond the workplace. A commitment that serves a customer while repeatedly breaking promises at home needs examination. So does a decision to leave that ignores the responsibilities we have agreed to uphold. The order of Jesus calls us to consider the whole of what has been entrusted to us, rather than allowing one part to make unlimited demands on the rest.

We can also find satisfaction in work without making it our source of worth. A job well done is something to enjoy, and recognition can be received gratefully. These become dangerous when we ask them to provide the identity and security we are meant to receive in Christ. Grace enables us to work with care and to rest without believing that every quiet hour diminishes our value.

Don't Let Your Experience Retire With You

After decades of work, much of what you know may no longer feel remarkable. It has become familiar. You recognize situations without consciously recalling the experiences that taught you to do so. Someone earlier in the journey may not yet have that judgment, and a thoughtful explanation from you could spare them unnecessary confusion or harm.

Organizations sometimes recognize the value of experience only after it leaves. Procedures may be documented, but the rationale behind key decisions remains in one person's memory. When you have the opportunity, you can help by documenting a process, explaining a recurring problem, or

providing someone with supervised practice while you are still available to answer questions. A useful handover is a concrete expression of stewardship.

Sharing experience requires both discretion and generosity. We should respect confidential information, the responsibilities of our role, and the dignity of the people whose stories have taught us.

We can explain a principle without disclosing someone else's private circumstances. We can also ask what another person needs rather than assuming that everything we know should be their lesson.

Perhaps the most valuable contribution of your final working years will be the person you help prepare. Yet that opportunity is not always within your control. An abrupt departure, an employer's decision, or illness may prevent the handover you would have chosen. You are responsible for making reasonable efforts within your opportunity, not for controlling whether an organization receives them or for how someone performs after you leave.

Once a responsibility has been transferred, give the new person room to carry it out. Offer support within the arrangements you have made, while resisting the urge to continue directing the work from a distance. Helping someone grow means accepting that they may do things differently. A successful transition does not require your continued presence at the center.

Recognizing When a Season Ends

Near the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus prayed to the Father:

“I glorified You on the earth by accomplishing the work which You have given Me to do.” —
John 17:4 (NASB 2020)

Later, on the cross, He said, “It is finished!” (John 19:30, NASB 2020). These words belong to Christ's unique mission and saving work. They are not a promise that we will know every career decision with the same certainty, nor do they make a retirement date equivalent to His completed work. We rest in what He accomplished; we do not repeat it.

From that security, we can examine our responsibilities with humility. Some work should continue. Some needs to be shared, changed, or released. We may be very good at starting and continuing, yet find it difficult to finish, especially when finishing requires someone else to take our place.

Discernment often unfolds in ordinary conversations. What does your wife experience with your current schedule? What do those who know your work observe? Which financial obligations remain? What is changing in your health or capacity? Bring those realities into prayer and planning. You do not have to manufacture absolute certainty before taking a carefully considered step, nor do you have to make a dramatic change simply because a chapter has raised the question.

The plan that follows is intended to provide direction. It may confirm that your current work still fits. It may also identify an adjustment, a handover, a period of rest, or a question that requires further counsel. Whatever the answer, the next step should be small enough to take and clear enough to review.

Your Remaining Years Plan

My Work Transition Plan

Transition does not necessarily mean leaving your job. It means considering how your relationship with work should align with this season of life. If you are already retired, out of work, or primarily caring for family, answer from that perspective. Use a notebook if you need more space.

My Work Purpose and Present Responsibilities

My current work situation and the responsibilities it entails are:

I want my work to honor Jesus and serve people in the following ways:

The financial or caregiving responsibilities that any change must take into account are:

The parts of my work that still align with my abilities and circumstances are:

The present costs to my marriage, family, health, rest, or life with Jesus that require attention are:

What I need to hear from the people affected, rather than assume for them, is this:

A Direction Worth Considering

Choose a path to explore: continue as I am, change how I work, reduce or transfer responsibilities, prepare to leave, seek suitable work, or settle into life after paid employment. This is a starting point for discernment, not a requirement to make an immediate career decision.

The direction I believe deserves attention, along with my reasons:

Facts, counsel, or conversations I need before making a significant change include:

One responsibility I could share, change, or release with an appropriate person or process for discussing it is:

Experience I could appropriately pass on to someone who may welcome it:

If my work changes, the relationships, rest, ordinary joys, or forms of service I hope to make room for include:

A limit that would help me avoid carrying over the old demands into the next season is:

You do not have to replace one career with another full-time schedule. Allow the plan to reflect your capacity and your responsibilities.

One Thing I Will Begin

Choose one action for the next seven days. If sharing your experience is a suitable starting point, invite someone to a conversation. Ask what they are working through and whether your experience would be helpful. If another need is more pressing, choose a conversation about your schedule, a practical handover step, or a request for guidance.

The action I will take and the date I will take it are:

The people I need to involve and what I want to understand before offering answers are:

The help or arrangement I need to make this possible is:

My Work Commitment:

Write two or three sentences stating the relationship you want with work, the next step you will take, and a responsibility or limit you will uphold. A retirement date is optional; a clear direction and an action are enough to begin.

I will review this commitment on this date, along with the rest of my plan:

At that review, ask whether you took the step, what you learned from those affected, and what adjustment is needed. Evaluate your conduct and decisions rather than using another person's response as a measure of your faithfulness.

Leaving Work Better Than We Found It

There is nothing wrong with receiving compensation or benefits earned through years of legitimate service. Responsible provision belongs within stewardship. Jesus > Others > Self also invites us to consider what people receive for working alongside us. Have we treated them honestly? Have we made room for their growth? When it was within our power, have we helped them carry the work forward?

Those questions apply to every season of work, not just the final week before retirement. We can begin addressing them now through patient teaching, clear communication, dependable effort, and a willingness to share responsibility. We do not need to remain indispensable to make a lasting contribution.

Your job is an assignment, not your identity. That distinction lets you work hard without worshipping work, rest without apology, and let go of a position without believing you have lost your place in Christ. Whatever changes lie ahead, His grace remains the foundation for taking the next step.

Work also connects us to another part of what has been entrusted to us: money. Whether we have accumulated substantial resources or are still working to meet daily needs, those resources deserve a purpose. Having considered the place of work, we turn next to a question that goes beyond earning and accumulating: what is your money for?