

THE GOSPEL GOES TO WORK

GOD'S BIG CANVAS OF CALLING AND RENEWAL

Stephen R. Graves

Adapted for groups by

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Stephen R. Graves is a strategist, an executive coach, and an author. At any given time he's working with a handful of remarkable executives leading large global organizations and young social entrepreneurs who are just starting out. Steve has authored more than a dozen books that teach people how to flourish in their life and work. He holds an MDiv from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and a DMin from Dallas Theological Seminary.

When Steve isn't consulting or writing on strategy, leadership, or impact, you can find him backcasting in the cold, clear rivers of northwest Arkansas. To explore Steve's content and read his weekly blog, visit stephenrgraves.com.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This Bible study provides a guided process individuals and small groups can follow to explore the need to take the gospel to work and ways they can do so. This study is divided into six key topics:

1. The Gospel and Work
2. Individual Baseline
3. Individual Blue Sky
4. Organizational Baseline
5. Organizational Blue Sky
6. Take the Gospel to Work

One week of Bible study is devoted to each of these topics, and each week is divided into five days of personal study to be completed between group sessions. In the personal study you'll find biblical application and interactive questions that will help you understand and apply the teaching and coaching about how to take the gospel to work.

In addition to the personal study, six group sessions are provided to spark gospel conversations. Free downloadable videos are also available to supplement the group sessions. These videos feature discussions between author Steve Graves and people who are taking the gospel to work. Some of the video participants reflect on key ideas in several individual interviews, and a promotional video is also available. All of these videos can be downloaded at no cost from LifeWay.com/GospelGoestoWork.

Each group session is divided into three sections:

1. "Connect" focuses participants on the group session's topic of study.
2. "Explore" guides the group to engage with the main ideas of the group session and with a relevant Scripture passage.
3. "Transform" guides the group to respond to and apply the group session's teaching.

If you want to go deeper in your study, you may want to read the book on which this Bible study is based. *The Gospel Goes to Work* (KJK Inc. Publishing) is ISBN 978-1-9407-9414-3.

TIPS FOR LEADING A SMALL GROUP

Prayerfully Prepare

Whether you are facilitating this study for the first time or are inspired to guide another group through it as a result, prepare for each group session with prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to work through you and the group discussion as you point to Jesus each week through God's Word.

REVIEW the weekly material and group questions ahead of time.

PRAY for each person in the group.

Minimize Distractions

Do everything in your ability to help people focus on what's most important: connecting with God, with the Bible, and with one another.

CREATE A COMFORTABLE ENVIRONMENT. If group members are uncomfortable, they'll be distracted and therefore not engaged in the group experience.

TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION seating, temperature, lighting, refreshments, surrounding noise, and general cleanliness.

At best, thoughtfulness and hospitality show guests and group members they're welcome and valued in whatever environment you choose to gather. At worst, people may never notice your effort, but they're also not distracted.

Include Others

Your goal is to foster a community in which people are welcome just as they are but encouraged to grow spiritually. Always be aware of opportunities to include and invite.

INCLUDE anyone who visits the group.

INVITE new people to join your group.

Encourage Discussion

A good small-group experience has the following characteristics.

EVERYONE PARTICIPATES. Encourage everyone to ask questions, share responses, or read aloud.

NO ONE DOMINATES—NOT EVEN THE LEADER. Be sure your time speaking as a leader takes up less than half your time together as a group. Politely guide discussion if anyone dominates.

NOBODY IS RUSHED THROUGH QUESTIONS. Don't feel that a moment of silence is a bad thing. People often need time to think about their responses to questions they've just heard or to gain courage to share what God is stirring in their hearts.

INPUT IS AFFIRMED AND FOLLOWED UP. Make sure you point out something true or helpful in a response. Don't just move on. Build community with follow-up questions, asking how other people have experienced similar things or how a truth has shaped their understanding of God and the Scripture you're studying. People are less likely to speak up if they fear that you don't actually want to hear their answers or that you're looking for only a certain answer.

GOD AND HIS WORD ARE CENTRAL. Opinions and experiences can be helpful, but God has given us the truth. Trust Scripture to be the authority and God's Spirit to work in people's lives. You can't change anyone, but God can. Continually point people to the Word and to active steps of faith.

Keep Connecting

Think of ways to connect with group members during the week. Participation during the group session is always improved when members spend time connecting with one another outside the group sessions. The more people are comfortable with and involved in one another's lives, the more they'll look forward to being together. When people move beyond being friendly to truly being friends who form a community, they come to each session eager to engage instead of merely attending.

ENCOURAGE GROUP MEMBERS with thoughts, commitments, or questions from the session by connecting through emails, texts, and social media.

BUILD DEEPER FRIENDSHIPS by planning or spontaneously inviting group members to join you outside your regularly scheduled group time for meals; fun activities; and projects around your home, church, or community.

INTRODUCTION

Four Categories

Every Christian on the planet falls into one of four categories in regard to taking the gospel to work:

- Those who don't think the gospel has any relevance or place in everyday work life
- Those who think the gospel belongs at work but only in the realm of private attitudes
- Those who want to take the gospel to work but find themselves confused, unmotivated, or alone in that aim
- Those who've discovered that the reach, power, and intent of the gospel can revolutionize any worker's approach to any work in any setting

Authenticity

I remember having a breakfast meeting with a CEO in Chicago who said, "It's being involved in the rigor of the business world day in and day out that keeps my life of faith strong." After pondering his comment, I think I understood what he meant. The pressure, demands, and choices endemic to business require a transparency and an authenticity in our faith that aren't found in the rhythms of religion.

I've been hanging around the faith-and-work corner all my adult life. At times I tried to add catalytic thinking and enthusiasm. Other times I found myself researching and learning from the Scriptures, the thinkers of the past, and the leaders of the present. And sometimes I simply sat down on a bench and lingered, listened, and watched people of faith go to work every day. What a rich and challenging field trip it has been.

A Fresh Framework

As we shift to the next generation's leadership in every aspect of work, I want to keep the conversation going by offering a few thoughts and frameworks to help Boomers, Millennials, and Generations X and Z discover the power, reach, and intent of the gospel's going to work.

At the same time, I hope veterans of faith and work will be open to a fresh framework that could trigger a new level of leadership and impact. The gospel conversation can be either about you (the individual) or about the organization you work for. The gospel has both individual and organizational applications.

This Bible study is written not from the pulpit or the classroom to the workplace but from the workplace back to the church. In other words, my voice is that of a practitioner, not a preacher or professor. The approach is simple and practical, inviting you to agree or disagree with what I'm saying and to get actively involved in the learning process.

Passion

I love the weekends. But I gotta tell you, I love the weekdays just as much. Somewhere back in my younger life, the passion for taking the gospel to work grabbed me and has never released me. I hope this Bible study will share a bit of that passion with you.



WEEK 1
**THE GOSPEL
AND WORK**

What makes up an average day for you? If you're like me, most of the best hours of most days are spent at work. You may be a young worker in the first ninety days of your job, a CEO considering your final three legacy years before retirement, or somewhere in between. No matter where you land on that continuum, if you're a follower of Jesus Christ, the question we all must answer is, What more can I do to integrate the gospel into my work?

Over the next six weeks we'll answer that question by using *The Gospel Goes to Work* grid. The gospel conversation can be either about you (the individual) or about the organization you work for. The gospel has both individual and organizational applications. Through personal reading and group discussion, you'll discover how this grid can provide a framework for taking the gospel to work.

BOTTOM LINE

The gospel affects all of life, including your work.



VIDEO SUMMARY

Use the statements below to follow along and take notes as you watch video session 1.

Scripture gives at least three catalytic metaphors, images that say, “This is what it looks like for faith or the gospel to show up anywhere.” One is salt, one is light, and one is sweet perfume. How have you seen the gospel do its salt work, its light work, and its perfume work in a job setting? How do you see that taking place?

The power, reach, and intent of the gospel are much greater than we often realize.

No matter where we are on our journey of faith, every day that we go into work, we go into the largest mission field in the world. For me not to do that is missing a huge opportunity in the greatest mission field that exists. That’s what gives me permission to show up at work and do what I do, which God has challenged me and called me to do, which may look very different from someone who has been called to sell everything and pack up and head out to a more traditionally described mission field.

CONNECT

1. When you were younger, what did you want to be when you grew up? What drew you to that profession?
2. Are you doing that job now? Why or why not?

EXPLORE

1. What first comes to mind when you hear the term *gospel*?
2. The Greek word for *gospel* means “good news.” Read Romans 10:14-15. Notice that the apostle Paul celebrated Christians who understand their responsibility to proclaim the gospel with their words and their lives.
3. Evaluate yourself on understanding and sharing the gospel in your daily life. Share your thoughts about you and the gospel.
4. Why do you believe it’s important for people of faith to take the gospel to work? What makes doing that hard and challenging?
5. How do you think it would affect your work life if you realized that work isn’t a mundane, necessary part of your life but an opportunity to build the kingdom of God?

TRANSFORM

1. Consider the statement “Wherever you are, whatever you’re doing, the gospel matters.” What would it look like to bring the reach, power, and intent of the gospel to all dimensions of your life?
2. Would your coworkers say you have interest and energy in their world, or would they write you off as only self-serving? Why?

Close the group session with prayer. Ask God for grace to see opportunities to display the good news in your workplace and in every other aspect of your life.

DAY 1 SPIRITUAL WORK

Is your work spiritual work? This is an important question to answer. It's common in our day to think of spiritual work and secular work as being distinct and different. This way of thinking sees secular work as performed by laypeople and necessary for income. But after people have reached a more advanced level of spirituality, they must step aside from their secular work as plumbers, teachers, truck drivers, or salespersons and enter vocational ministry, which performs the real spiritual work. Those who think this way don't say that laypeople don't perform spiritual work. Laypeople do—but only intermittently when they pray, read Scripture, volunteer at church, or perform acts of service.

How often do you feel that you truly perform spiritual work?

The problem with this way of thinking is that the Bible doesn't agree with it. Notice what the apostle Paul said to the workers in first-century Colossae:

Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done for the Lord and not for people, knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord. You serve the Lord Christ.

COLOSSIANS 3:23-24

All work is spiritual. Paul's point is that whom you work for is far more significant than what you do or where you work. The question "Is your work spiritual or secular?" is important. But Paul seems to tell us that the more important question is "Whom do you work for?"

A gospel-centered life is a way of thinking. Gospel-minded work starts with your mindset, your motivation, and your allegiance. We must begin to think of any vocation—from pastor to plumber, from missionary to brickmason, from chaplain to car salesperson—as spiritual work if it's ultimately done for Jesus.

What's one step you can take to set your mind on working for Jesus today?

DAY 2 THE CANVAS

Vincent Van Gogh, one of the world's greatest painters, was once quoted as saying, "I dream my painting and I paint my dream."¹ Whether or not he knew it, Van Gogh was borrowing a model from our Creator God.

Take a few minutes to read and meditate on God's creation account, found in Genesis 1. Which term describes your state of mind when you're reminded that God created everything that exists?

Awe	Excitement	Wonder	Joy
Confusion	Humility	Fear	Other:

Circle the five assignments that God gave to humankind in verse 28.

*God blessed them, and God said to them,
 "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it.
 Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky,
 and every creature that crawls on the earth."*

GENESIS 1:28

From the very beginning, God involved humans in His good work. God's intention is for us to do His work in the world. The most important work in which He involves us is to spread the gospel of His Son, Jesus Christ. The gospel needs to be implemented in every area of our lives.

Underline an area of your life in which the gospel is bearing fruit.

Family	Work	Church	Hobbies	Friends	Other:
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As you end today's study, circle the part of your life in which you'd most like to see the gospel have freer rein. Now pray that God will paint the entire canvas of your life with His good news.

DAY 3 GOSPEL GAPS

The world is God’s canvas on which He’s painting the powerful gospel story. Often He uses imperfect artists such as you and me to hold the brushes and even paint some of the strokes. But He wants the entire canvas covered; that is, He wants all of life to reflect His goodness. God’s desire is to paint His glory in every corner of the canvas of His creation.

Just turn on the news, and you’ll be reminded that many areas of the canvas are desperate for God’s goodness to be painted. We call these areas gospel gaps.

A gospel gap can be a spot in your life or your work that needs to be painted with God’s goodness. Gospel gaps have their root in what theologians call the fall, a term that refers to the effects of sin on humankind and on God’s good creation.

Read Genesis 3:14-19.

This passage describes the effects of sin on multiple domains of life: relationships, child-birth, the earth, and even work. When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, it changed everything. The effects of sin splattered all over the entire canvas of God’s good creation as evil set out to destroy God’s goodness.

Circle the sin-affected gospel gaps in the world that burden you most.

Sex trafficking

Racism

Unemployment

Fatherlessness

Self-serving leaders

Unethical business

Abuse

Poverty

Other:

What’s one gospel gap in your workplace, an area that sin tries to claim?

DAY 4 THE FOUR-ACT GOSPEL

Many Christians think of the drama of the gospel like a play with two acts: fall and redemption. In act 1 Adam and Eve's sin separated us from God, and humans would no longer be in perfect relationship with God. But in act 2 Jesus came, and now all who repent of their sin and believe in Him can be saved and made right with God. This narrative is beautiful and true. But it's not the whole story.

Read what God said to Satan in Genesis 3:15. Underline what He said the seed of the woman (Eve) will do to the enemy (Satan).

*I will put hostility between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring.
He will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.*

GENESIS 3:15

God broke into the dark moment of Adam and Eve's failure to declare that all creation, broken by the fall, could be redeemed and renewed by the good news. This is the Four-Act Gospel.

Act 1: Creation



Act 2: Fall



Act 3: Redemption



Act 4: Renewal

If you realize that renewing a broken world is an aspect of what God is doing, this can make a big difference in the way you approach your work. Your work life can be a partnership with God in His work. Any worker, then, can apply the gospel in any workplace, doing any work that isn't inherently sinful.

The Four-Act Gospel reminds us that even our work plays a role in God's work to redeem and renew the world. The type of gospel we believe in makes a difference because it affects the way we think about our purpose in life. If we have a Four-Act Gospel, we'll be in the business of both helping individuals know Jesus and contributing to God's mission of renewing the world. It takes both to bring complete honor and glory to God. It takes both to paint His full story on the canvas of your life and work.

In what ways do you reflect a Four-Act Gospel in the way you do your work? Consider these specific expressions.

Creativity:

Failure:

Forgiveness:

Fresh starts:

DAY 5 THE FRAMEWORK

Today we'll introduce two concepts that are key to understanding how the gospel goes to work. We find them in Luke 3. This chapter tells the story of an untamed, rustic, no-holds-barred preacher named John. He was known for preaching a bold message of repentance and then baptizing the people who responded. One day a crowd had gathered near the Jordan River. As John preached, the crowds began to ask him how they should respond to his message. Check it out.

Read Luke 3:7-11. What was so bold about John's words?

Would you be interested in listening to a preacher like him? Why or why not?

John was preaching the gospel and calling the people to repentance. It was a message that applied to everyone in the crowd—young and old, male and female, rich and poor, rural and urban, and workers of all types. The gospel was a universal invitation, and generosity was the universal response. Reflecting the love of God for us through the way we treat others is what we call the Baseline.

BASELINE

The minimal gospel witness offered by any company and its employees simply by the way they do their work, regardless of location, personality, title, age, or background.

Now read Luke 3:12-14. The tax collectors and soldiers asked John how they needed to change in order to live the gospel message. What applications did John give them?

First notice what John didn't tell them. He didn't tell any of them to quit their jobs and join vocational ministry. He told them to go back and do their jobs in ways that honor the Lord. But he answered each profession—tax collectors and soldiers—according to the requirements of that profession. The application John gave is what we call the Blue Sky.

BLUE SKY

The boundless horizons of what could be when a business or an employee personalizes an idea or insight that contextualizes the gospel.

Based on what you read in Luke 3, what are some ways John might tell you to live out the gospel (Blue Sky) in your work or profession?

I hope the Baseline and the Blue Sky are beginning to give you a vision for addressing gospel fundamentals at work. Let's add one more layer to it.

The gospel conversation can be either about you (the individual) or the organization you work for. The gospel has both individual and organizational applications. When you merge the Baseline-Blue Sky pair with the individual-organizational pair, you get what we'll call *The Gospel Goes to Work* grid. With this grid you can begin to fill the empty spaces of life's canvas with gospel paint.



In the remainder of our study together, we'll explore each quadrant of this grid in great detail. But let's take a glance today.

INDIVIDUAL BASELINE

Employed followers of Jesus are accountable to represent Him by doing their work to the best of their ability.

INDIVIDUAL BLUE SKY

How workers tap into their imagination, wiring, and calling to harness the power, reach, and intent of the gospel through their work.

Think about a colleague at work. List some differences between you and him or her.

	YOU	COLLEAGUE
Background		
Education		
Family		
Personality		
Strengths		

Notice the differences between the two lists. Even two people working at the same kind of job at the same company can have drastically different personalities, interests, passions, and ambitions. Even if both of them are followers of Christ, they wouldn't express the gospel the same way. Because you're unique, I can't give you a list of what your Blue Sky actions are. But in week 3 I'll help you develop a vision for your Individual Blue Sky.

Think about it. If Christians lived out only the Individual Baseline quadrant and none of the other three, spiritual awakening would break out. But when Christians are embedded in an organization, some gospel-centered characteristics should naturally emerge. We call these the Organizational Baseline and the Organizational Blue Sky.

ORGANIZATIONAL BASELINE

Values and thresholds that any organization doing any kind of work should embody if it hopes to be a credible conduit for the gospel.

ORGANIZATIONAL BLUE SKY

Any organization can demonstrate God's renewal process in extraordinary ways in its specific industry by using imagination and inspiration to guide its operations to new outcomes.

Churches often hold celebration services to recognize and honor people whom God calls to the "sacred" work of vocational ministry. But in the same way God has called pastors and missionaries, He calls gospel-proclaiming men and women in every city and every community around the world. They occupy all industries and sectors. They're embedded in megaglobal companies. They own local bakeries or insurance agencies. They've launched their own social-media marketing firms. They coach junior-high basketball teams. When those men and women embrace and live out the realities of *The Gospel Goes to Work* grid, gospel movements can break out in workplaces everywhere.

1. Vincent Van Gogh, "Vincent Van Gogh Quotes," *Goodreads*, accessed February 1, 2017, https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/34583.Vincent_van_Gogh.