

# Working for the Lord

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] chapter 6, verses 1 through 5. And as we turn here, I invite you to go with me, either in your worship guide or on your phone or in your Bible. But remember that no matter where you turn, this is God's Word. And God tells us that His Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold.

And it is sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so that's why we read now, starting at verse 1. It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps to be throughout the whole kingdom. And over them three high officials, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account so that the king might suffer no loss. Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him.

And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. Then these men said, we shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we thank you again that you give us week after week, day after day, the gift of your word, and that you speak into all the different situations and challenges of our lives. You care about our spiritual lives, and you care about our economic lives, our vocations.

And so we ask that you would come this morning by your spirit, and that you would speak clearly through your word, that you would help us, and that you would challenge us and encourage us by what we learn here. But you and your ways with Daniel, and also with us, we ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. When we talked about government last week, I gave you an example of the numbering of days of a kingdom with the fall of the Berlin Wall. But as you know, of course, that's not the only place where communism had a hold. In the 1980s, of course, there was also the end of the Soviet Union, Soviet Union. And near that time in the 1980s, Mikhail Gorbachev, who became the last president of the Soviet Union, attempted to try to revitalize his country. He had this entire project that he undertook to try to pull them out of the problems that they'd fallen into. And one of the things, by the way, Gorbachev is well known for being an atheist. One of the things that this atheist realized he needed to do was recruit Christians to help him. Now, this is not as well known. It's discussed in the book I mentioned a few weeks ago, *Candles Behind the Wall*, which talks about the role of Christians in the fall of communism. But he recognized that if he was going to revive the economy and the society, he needed a few things. First of all, he needed wonderful workers, and he also needed people with spiritual strength. Because even as an atheist, he understood what it was Christians could offer. He understood that there was a spiritual need, even as he also, at the same time, failed to understand it. There's a fascinating article that came out in *Christianity Today* in 1992 called *Praying with the KGB*. And it talks about some of these dynamics that were at place as the

Soviet Union realized the spiritual void that they had. And so we have in this chapter something similar. We have a Christian working with non-Christians. We have a Christian who's recognized. Now, we wouldn't have called him a Christian at the time, right? He's an Israelite.

[ 3 : 39 ] But we understand the one people of God. People of God in the Old Testament were the Israelites. People of God in the New Testament, the church. We have someone who's recognized for the excellence of his work ethic. And so as we go in today, we're going to look at three things. First, the importance of work.

Second, the power of work. And third, the praise from work. We're going to see the importance of work, the power for work, and the praise from work. And of course, first we see the importance of work.

And much like these Christians that Gorbachev recruited, we see Daniel's excellence. In verses one through two, it's clear that he is one of the best. He becomes one of the top three administrators in this government of Darius. He and two other men are going to oversee everything that happens in this empire. Of course, that's not enough, though. In verse three, we see he's quickly on the fast track. He's not just going to be one of the top three. He's going to be the top.

He's on the way to running the entire kingdom. We hear this in verse three. The king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. And then also in verse three, Daniel became distinguished above all. He's distinguished above the other workers. And there was an excellent spirit in him. Now, we've heard about this spirit earlier in the book of Daniel. We know it's the spirit of God that is empowering and enabling Daniel. It's giving him what he needs. And this is not the first time, by the way, we've seen this. This is a theme that's been going on through the book of Daniel that we're pausing now to remember. In Daniel chapter one, you'll remember Daniel was better than anyone else in the training program because God blessed him. In Daniel chapter two and chapter five, the end of the story is that Daniel got a promotion. And so over and over, Daniel is recognized for the excellence that he demonstrates in his work. He's recognized for his skill and his ability. Here, we're told, this is in verse four and three and four and five, there's an excellent spirit in him. Verse four, these other men who are jealous can't find a complaint against him because he was faithful and there was no error or fault found in him. In other words, Daniel wasn't just incredibly gifted. He was also incredibly hardworking. He was this model employee. There's a reason that people talk about what's called the Protestant work ethic.

That is that Protestants are known for being disciplined and diligent in their work. And the reason that that it's true is because it's biblical. The Bible teaches us this. It gives us this model that we work in the world. We want to be known as people who are like Daniel, who are faithful. There's no fault found in us. We're known for our integrity and our ability. We want to give our best in our work.

[ 6 : 20 ] Now, Daniel's excellence does give him a platform. Remember, we talked about that with Olympic athletes. He's able to speak into some of these difficult situations. It also, however, gives him a much more than that.

When I was in high school, I took an English class at one point. I think it was a literature class. It was at a Christian school. And so this class started with this teacher trying to explain to us why it was that we were taking the class. And she went through a variety of reasons. But the main reason she gave us at the very end was that we were taking this class so that we would be better prepared to share the gospel with other people, which sounds like a wonderful answer, right? Because this is a Christian school, that's what we should be doing. As a high school student, though, I thought, that doesn't really make sense. Something's wrong with this. I already know how to read. I know how to write. I have actually the skills I need at this point to share the gospel. I don't need to study all these great works of literature to be able to do that. I'm equipped, right? There's got to be something more than just that. Our work can't just be instrumental only for that reason. Of course, that's what we saw earlier this morning in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, right? All of our work is something we can do to the glory of

God. It's a good goal. It's good and right to be able to share the gospel with other people. And everything we do is meant to enjoy God and to glorify him forever. And we can find that, for example, in this English class. It was later when I became a teacher, I was able to articulate this. Yes, we want to be able to share the gospel. Also, God's a God of language, and he's made it, and he communicates with us.

And we honor and glorify him when we excel at that. God is a God of stories. He is honored and glorified when we understand and love and are able to tell good stories. We can glorify God in all sorts of different ways. God made language in relationships. We interact in those relationships with that language.

We glorify God in that way. There's all kinds of work that needs to be done that involves us communicating with other people as we follow God's command to subdue the earth and take dominion.

[ 8 : 26 ] And so we see that Daniel, in his secular work, his work is good for itself. He is able to speak the truth to these kings, and he makes sure Babylon runs well. Imagine that. What a blessing to God's people who are living there to have a city that runs well. What a blessing to the pagans who are there, to have a city that runs well. I had a seminary professor who loved to pose this thought experiment, mostly to push buttons. He would say, I want you to imagine that there's a day, and on that day, all the pastors disappear and all the plumbers disappear. Who are you going to notice is missing first?

Now, now that I'm a few years removed, I want to ask him, imagine all the seminary professors disappeared. But he was making a point about our work, right? There's all sorts of things that we do to the honor and glory of God that us as people rely on and work together in this world. And so we see here, as we're looking at the importance of work, Daniel shows us a couple things. We see his excellence that he wants to do work well. We also see the significance of work. What he's doing matters for Babylon. What you are doing matters for Colorado Springs. It matters for this world.

If you're a teacher, if you're a parent, you are developing hearts and minds that God has given our children so that they can go out and take care of the people in the world that God's given us. If you're in the military, you're doing important work to keep the wicked away from the innocent and to punish evildoers. If you're an engineer, you're using the beautiful rules that God's put in place in the universe that we've discovered to create wonderful and amazing things that help people to thrive and flourish. And we could go on and on. Daniel is an example of what it looks like for our work to glorify God in all sorts of ways, in all sorts of areas.

And so we can embrace our work, right, as something that's good. When we get up on Monday, it's not somehow wildly disconnected from Sunday. We'll talk about that a little bit more in a minute.

But that's the way we can think about these things if we're in the workplace. Now, not all of us find ourselves receiving a paycheck. We can still think of the things that we do throughout the day as what honors and glorifies God. Remember I mentioned earlier, teachers and parents, as we're raising up our kids, we're helping to grow and develop and nurture the minds that God's given them.

[ 11 : 06 ] We're enabling them to go out and follow after God's mission and his ways. Now, I'll also say this to you kids. Some of you don't have jobs. And your parents hope and pray that one day you will.

And so I want you to think about this. As you think about future work, the time to prepare is now. Daniel didn't just wake up one day when he was 18 and he was suddenly excellent at these things, right? We can assume that Daniel, when he was living with God's people before there was an exile, that he was being raised to be diligent and faithful, that he trusted what he was told and the things that he needed to learn and do. When I was a teacher, one of the challenges of being a teacher, and this is related to the challenges of youth, is that the people you teach don't always understand how important it is for them to learn it. And you try, right? You want to convince them and urge them and persuade them that this is something worthwhile. You want to do the best job you can at that.

Also, at some point, you need to do what I began to tell some of the high school boys that I worked with. You just need to shut up and sit down and do the work that you have in front of you and trust that even though you may not understand why it's valuable, you have the humility to work at it now.

One of the challenges of being young, whether you're a child or a young adult, is that it's difficult to connect present actions to future consequences. That's part of why we need older people in our lives.

They have a view of the lifespan more than we do. They can say, look, I know this doesn't seem important now. It will be important one day. You just need to trust me. You do not have wisdom yet.

[ 12 : 48 ] You will one day. Prepare for that day now. So whether we're people who have work or people who look forward to work, we can look at Daniel and his example. This is also something that we can talk about and model as families. When I was growing up, one of the things that my mother would do all the time is she would say to my brothers and I, two older brothers, she would quote Proverbs 22 verse 29 to us.

And she would send it says this, do you see a man who's skilled in his work? He will serve before kings. He will not serve before mere men. And then she would turn to us and she would say, and you see your father. Your father is skilled in his work. He serves before kings.

What was my mom doing? She's doing a few things. First of all, she was communicating to us, I, as your mother, am very proud of your father. You should be proud of him as well. Also, look at your father's diligent work. You also should aim and strive to be diligent workers. Be proud of him.

Be like him. Work hard. Children can also take pride in the work of their parents. Proverbs 17 verse 6 tells us that the glory of children is their father's. There's something about looking at the generation that's ahead of us, seeing them as examples and spurring them on. Remember when we were in Daniel chapter 1, I talked about the fact that God gives people favor. As families, we can be praying that our parents who are in the workplace would receive favor. That's something we can embrace together, that they would have wisdom. I don't want to get ahead of myself here, but next week we're going to look at prayer. In Daniel chapter 2, Daniel thanks God for the wisdom he gave him. There's some practical things for us as a church, as families, as we think about work, both our vocation and the vocations of people who we love. Now, remember on Easter, I told you that story about my dad giving us a percentage of his bonus as children. He was teaching us a few things. One was that we are in this together as a family. My work is not disconnected from you. This is something that we as a family is part of our mission that we're accomplishing together. We are all part of the same team.

We can also pray for those who are young in our congregation, that God would grow them up and give them work that has purpose and power. He'd be giving them the opportunities and the education and the resources that they need now to prepare them for everything that they have ahead of them.

[ 15 : 16 ] Kids, I told you, now's the time to prepare. It's also good and right to aspire for meaningful, significant, powerful work. God's made us like that. He's made us to work. That's a wonderful thing to desire. It's a wonderful thing to want and to work for and to pray for. And so as we're looking at the importance of work here as we study Daniel, I'm getting at two things here. I'm getting at the excellence of work. We want to be known as Christians as people who do good work and we want to know as Christians that our work matters. Our work matters to God because this world matters to God. What Daniel did in presenting God's truth to kings mattered a lot and what Daniel did making sure Babylon ran well mattered a lot. Daniel's work matters. Our work matters as well.

Now, as I say sometimes, everything I've just told you for the most part would work great as an inspirational talk in a place given by a person who's not a Christian to a bunch of people who are also not Christians. And so we have to ask what is uniquely Christian about our view of work?

Some of it is what we've already talked about, the fact that God's created this world. He's given us commands to go forth, to be fruitful, to multiply, to subdue the earth, to have dominion. I'm taking that from Genesis chapter 1, especially verse 28. Another element, though, is what we see next year. We've seen the importance of work. We also see the power of work. Work matters. It matters for everyone. How does being a Christian change that? Well, we've seen throughout the book of Daniel how intimately God is involved in Daniel's work. Chapter 1, God's the one who gives Daniel favor in the eyes of the people who works with. Okay. Daniel chapter 1, again, Daniel and his friends are more excellent than anyone else.

Why? God's the one at work. He's giving them the wisdom they need. God is supernaturally empowering them, enabling them to do good work. We see that later in the book as well. Over and over, we hear this phrase, the spirit of the gods is in you. Daniel chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar says, I know the spirit of the gods is in you. Later, Daniel chapter 5, the queen is telling Belteshazzar about Daniel, reminds him he has the spirit of the holy gods in him. Belteshazzar comes to talk to Daniel. Oh my, you have the spirit of the holy gods in you. Over and over, we see that God gives Daniel favor. He also gives Daniel wisdom and skill. And so it's not simply that Daniel's a good worker, but Daniel is someone who receives God's blessing and his favor. Remember, I mentioned earlier too, in Daniel chapter 2, we see Daniel's prayer. He thanks God for the things he's given him, the success that he's given him. And finally, God gives Daniel longevity. I pointed this out at the beginning of chapter 1. It shows up in other chapters as well. Kings come and go. Daniel remains.

God maintains Daniel preserving him, keeping him where he's at. And so we see it's not just that Daniel works hard and he's diligent. That by itself would not be enough. Daniel has God's favor and his help. It would be simply moralistic, right, if I just told you, look at Daniel. He's such a great example. But it's so much more than that. Look at Daniel as God uses his work in a powerful way. In other words, God is the one who gives purpose and power to our work. He is the one who makes it meaningful. He's the one who makes it powerful. God is the secret to Daniel's career success.

[ 19 : 08 ] God's the one who's at work raising him up in the ladder. So it's good and right for us to pray to God, right, asking him for his help. We pray about many things. It's good and right to pray that our friends who do not know Jesus would come to know him. It is also good and right that God would give us the skills we need to glorify him in our work. It's good and right to pray that God would give us good relationships with the people we work with, knowing that God cares. He loves the work that we do in this world. And so as we think about our vocation as a church, what we do here on Sunday is not disconnected from what we do on Monday. There's not these two spheres that we exist in. But I want you to think about it in this way. It's tempting at times for people to think that their work is only to support the church. Well, I do this job, right, and I do it so that I can give to the church, and that's the work that really matters. Now, don't hear what I'm not saying. The church really matters.

Now, part of why Daniel's able to stand firm and fast is because he has been raised well in the community of Israel. He's been strengthened and encouraged. He has his friends with him. Also, this is the concept I've talked about before, the church as a heartbeat. The church, when we come together and worship, this is the heart that pulls the blood all together. We come here to the lungs, and we get the oxygen that we need. And then what happens at the end of the service?

I give you the benediction, and you get sent right back out into the world. We come together. We're reminded of what's true. God feeds us in his word. We worship him in song, and then we're sent out to do what God's commanded us to do. We're commissioned and enabled and empowered.

Another way to think of it would be like this. Right before COVID, the end of 2019, the movie Ford versus Ferrari came out. It's about the 1966 Le Mans race where Ford is trying to beat Ferrari. And some of the most fun scenes are when you have the race car drivers pull in, and the pit crew runs out, and they're changing all the tires, and they're filling up the fuel as fast as they can so the car can get back on the road. There is a sense in which that is what we do together on Sunday morning. We come in. The church is here changing our tires and fueling us up so that we can go back out into the world for God's mission. Our work matters to God. It is not separated from the church. Both matter. We're here. Our worship of God is important, and he sends us out, and we're accomplishing his mission. He is the one who gives us the power and the ability that we need to go out and serve him. That's what we see in Daniel's life. That is true of us as well.

And so we have, first, the importance of work, the power for work. It's the power that God gives us. He's at work in our work. And then finally, we see the praise that comes from work. I've talked before about the concept of things that are not bad but dangerous, right? Power. Power's not bad. It's very dangerous. Money. Money's not bad. Very dangerous. Success. Not bad. Very, very dangerous.

[ 22 : 22 ] Very, very dangerous because our temptation is to become isolated from other people. Our temptation is to believe the stories about ourselves, that we are these wonderful and great people. In fact, there have been studies that show that powerful, wealthy, successful people often have less empathy than people with less power and money and success. And so there's a real risk here. There's a risk for Daniel for that he would become exactly like what we saw in Daniel chapter 4. Remember, Nebuchadnezzar had great success and he worshiped himself. Then same thing happens. Chapter 5. Belteshazzar, great success, worships himself. Daniel's secret. What is it? Great success, worships God. Daniel never forgets where the power for his work comes from. We never find Daniel congratulating himself or patting himself on the back. In fact, we see in Daniel chapter 2, verse 23, Daniel has this prayer where he thanks God for giving him when he needed to interpret the vision. He says,

To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise for you have given me wisdom and might and have now made known to me what we asked of you. For you have made known to us the king's matter. Daniel does this amazing thing. He interprets the king's dream. Even more than interpreting the king's dream, he knows what the dream is without the king telling him. That's chapter 2. And instead of saying, man, I am such a smart Israelite, he says, man, God has really blessed me. He has given me wisdom.

He's given me skill. Praise God. And so Daniel is able to rise up above the ranks. We're not told this explicitly, but I think I would say God is willing to let him rise up the ranks because he knows that Daniel has the humility to handle it. In other words, Daniel's success is not dangerous to him.

Because Daniel praises God for it. And so the same is true for us. As we work in this world, there is no place in the Christian life for chest beating and self-congratulation.

We give the honor and glory to God. Christians don't sing their own praises. They sing God's praises. By the way, that's one of the things we do here at the heart that pulls us together on Sunday.

[ 24 : 45 ] We're reminding ourselves of what's true. We praise God, remembering that he's the one who blesses our work. Daniel knows where the excellence comes from. And I'm going to get ahead of myself a little bit because we're going to talk about prayer next week. But Daniel has a rich and robust prayer life.

I'm going to suggest that's part of what protects him from the dangers of success. In his book on prayer, Tim Keller tells us that there are some things God can only give us through prayer because prayer is what makes them safe. In other words, if he gave them to us aside from prayer, we would think, wow, we're so wonderful and great. I just achieved this.

Prayer protects us from that because when we pray and we see God answer, we're forced to say, oh, wow, God answered that prayer. Give God the praise, the honor, and the glory.

And so I believe that's part of the secret here of Daniel's success. And as I mentioned earlier this morning, giving God praise and honor for our work, that's part of what we do when we give our money back to him.

My dad, remember, gave us that portion, that 1% of his bonus. And I can promise you we had to tithe on that. And so it was not just look at the way that we as a family are working together, but also look at the way that God is at work blessing and prospering and helping us.

[ 26 : 12 ] Give him the glory. And so Daniel serves here as a wonderful example, a model for us, letting us know how it is that we live faithful lives in a foreign land.

Of course, our Lord Jesus teaches us the same thing as well. In Matthew chapter 24, we find, or chapter 25, we find the parable of the talents. Jesus tells a story about a master who leaves his servants, and he gives them a variety of amounts of money.

One person gets five talents. One man gets two talents. One man gets one talent. So they have different abilities, different opportunities, different resources. The top two, the man with the five talents and the man with the two talents, invest their talents and double it.

Now, we won't talk about the man with the one talent. He hides it in the ground, doesn't do anything with it. Jesus, though, the master, represents God or Jesus, comes back to these men who have invested in it.

He says what? Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little. I will set you over much. Enter in to the joy of your master.

[ 27 : 21 ] And so there's a reward. It's based on their faithfulness and their diligence, right? Daniel has a skill. He has an ability that none of us in this room have. How do I know that?

None of you have been set over the top three in the kingdom. And yet, all of us can be faithful and diligent with the gifts that God has given us. We're working for the master.

It's what we saw in Colossians chapter 3. We know there's a reward that's coming. That's what our Lord Jesus tells us. And as we saw in Colossians chapter 3, we're to work as if working for the Lord.

Not as some kind of mind trick, but because it's actually true. And it's true because we belong to God and also because this world belongs to God.

And so as we do work in it, we are following God and his commands. And so Christian, what do we do with our work? How do we think about work in this world?

[ 28 : 18 ] What does Daniel have to teach us? Daniel shows us that our work should have excellence and that it has significance. Daniel teaches us that God is the one who gives us the power and the ability and the wisdom.

And so we see we respond to that by giving him all honor and glory and praise because he is the one who is at work in our work. We know ultimately because this is what our Lord Jesus teaches us and tells us.

And so we can give all praise and honor and glory to God. So I invite you to pray with me. Our Father in heaven, we thank you and praise you for the gift of work. We ask that you would enable us to serve you diligently in the many places that you've called us.

That you'd bless our work. You'd give favor to the people in this room, in this congregation. In the eyes of those who they work for and the eyes of those who work for them. That you'd show them the ways that you're using their work in this world in powerful ways.

And we ask most of all that we would give all honor and praise and glory to you. Because we know that you are the one who gives us every blessing. We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ.

[ 29 : 29 ]    Amen.