

Prayer:

Father, please give us wisdom and self-control to steward our time in this life for your glory and the good of others.

Overview of the Course:

Vocation: What Am I Called to Do and to Be?

1. **The Caller and the Called: What is the Context of Calling?**
 - Your life is not your own. God is the Caller; we are the called. Find your calling in His Word.
 - Love Christ by obedience to His call and thus pursue your purpose: to glorify and enjoy Him forever.
2. **The Meaning of Means: What is the Concept of Calling?**
 - You are part of a royal priesthood. All work for the Lord is sacred – it has meaning and worth.
 - God loves His people through His people. Loving your neighbor is the framework of faithful calling.
3. **The Scope of the Summons: What is the Content of Calling?**
 - Christ is Lord over every sphere of life. You are called to glorify and enjoy Him in all things.
 - The Dominion Mandate and the Great Commission are equally ultimate ends.
4. **Calling Lived Out – In Our Work**
 - The framework applied to our work – in all our labor, including our jobs, and in our rest.
 - Common pitfalls: idolatry, identity, and indifference. Truths we must not forget in our work.
5. **Calling Lived Out – In Our Families**
 - The family is the basic unit of all society; it's the institution through which humanity lives on.
 - Abandoning God's Word as to the structure and functions of the family is devastating to all.
6. **Calling Lived Out – In Our Church**
 - The church is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ and is marked by certain defining traits.
 - Faithful followers of Christ will be members of His church and obey His commandments therein.
7. **Calling Lived Out – In Our Society**
 - God has ordained and established various, distinct institutions which make up His creational order.
 - Christ governs, with all authority, ever sphere of life and all must submit to His lordship in them.
8. **Wrong Way: How NOT to Discern God's Will**
 - In our biblical ignorance, we are tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine.
 - We misunderstand not only the nature of God's will, but also the pathways of learning it.
9. **Proper Path: How to Discern God's Will**
 - God is a good Father and a perfect Teacher. He offers clarity and not confusion for his children.
 - His Word teaches us how to think and make decisions like Him as we bear His image in the world.
10. **Productivity: Stewarding Our Most Limited Resource (Time)**
 - You are not your own. You exist to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Motivation and fruit both matter.
 - Technology is a form of wealth to be leveraged for the Kingdom in our limited time under the sun.

Goal of Lesson 10:

This is our last class together. Today, I want to spend a little time summarizing what we've learned thus far and then shift the discussion towards some thoughts around stewardship and productivity.

Question:

What have you learned thus far? ... or ...

What has stood out to you as memorable or important (even if you already knew it before the class)?

Lesson 10: Productivity – Stewarding Our Most Limited Resource (Time)

Recommended Resources (Books – 2 Christian, 2 “Secular”):

1. Redeeming Productivity: Getting More Done for the Glory of God

- Author: **Reagan Rose**
- Founder of Redeeming Productivity, a media ministry focused on a biblical approach to personal productivity. Reagan is the Director of Digital Platforms at John MacArthur’s Grace to You ministry and has a Master of Divinity from The Master’s Seminary and lives in Michigan with his wife, Kim, and their two children.
- Published by Moody Publishers in 2022.

2. Productivity: A Practical Theology of Work & Wealth

- Author: **Douglas Wilson**
- Wilson is the author of more than 100 books and has been a pastor for 40 years. He is also the founder of a K-12 school, a liberal arts college, a denomination, and an international classical education organization. He blogs prolifically at dougwils.com. Doug has been married to Nancy for more than 40 years, and they have 3 grown children and hordes of grandchildren.
- Published by Canon Press in 2020.

3. Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones

- Author: **James Clear**
- Clear is an author and speaker focused on habits, decision-making, and continuous improvement. His work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Time*, and *Entrepreneur Magazine*. His website receives millions of visitors each month, and hundreds of thousands subscribe to his popular email newsletter. He is a regular speaker at Fortune 500 companies and his work is used by teams in the NFL, NBA, and MLB. Clear is an avid weightlifter and photographer. He lives with his wife in Columbus, Ohio.
- Published by Avery, an imprint of Penguin Random House in 2018.

4. Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World

- Author: **Cal Newport**
- Cal is the author of seven books, including, most recently, *A World Without Email*, *Digital Minimalism*, and *Deep Work*. His titles have cumulatively sold well over 2,000,000 copies, have been published in 40 languages, and include multiple *New York Times* bestsellers. He is currently the Provost’s Distinguished Professor of Computer Science at Georgetown University, is a contributing writer for the *New Yorker* and is the host of the *Deep Questions* podcast. He lives with his wife and children in Washington, D.C.
- Published by Grand Central Publishing, a division of the Hachette Book Group, in 2016.

All of the way back in January, at the beginning of this class, I told you that:

The goal of this course is for students **to discover**, or *rediscover*, as the case may be, **the wisdom and love of God in His various callings upon our lives** so that we may run the race set before us well and, by His grace at work in us, we might accomplish more of that which He has purposed us to do and to be: namely, to glorify God and enjoy Him forever as a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, proclaiming the virtues of Him who called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9).

1 Pet. 2:11-12 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and **glorify God** on the day of visitation.

Jesus teaches us in **Matthew 6** that we are not to "lay up for [ourselves] treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but [to] lay up for [ourselves] treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal."

"For where your treasurer is," Jesus says, "there your heart will be also."

He goes on to warn us that we will be tempted to serve the treasures here on earth. Our hearts will naturally drift that way. In the flesh, we want fleshly things. But, He says, "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

This causes an ongoing tension within our hearts. It is not something that we one day resolve and never have to return to, but rather is something that we will continuously have to discipline ourselves in order to pursue – as Jesus teaches elsewhere in **Matthew 16**, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

In **Luke's** account of that teaching (**9:23**) ... and remember ... Luke bears the more precise pen of a doctor who has "carefully investigated everything from the beginning" and is writing "an orderly account...so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught," he emphasizes the necessary ongoing struggle here by quoting Jesus more fully in His saying:

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross **daily** and follow me."

Now, back to the Matthew account, Jesus goes on graciously and lovingly and with great compassion and understanding of our weak and fallen frame, that we are not to be anxious about any of those earthly concerns – "about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on."

And then He asks a question to help us understand the context behind such a command against worry. He asks, "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"

And what is the answer we're to immediately understand? Of course, life is more than food and clothes! Birds have ample food and flowers are clothed in beauty, but they are nowhere close to as valuable as human beings – as those creatures who God made in His very image and who He loved so much that He sent His only begotten Son to live, die, and resurrect from the dead in order to save and reconcile to Himself.

He then gives a command: "Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ... But [rather] seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

These are our marching orders when it comes to a productive Christian life. This is how we bear much fruit.

So, to that end, I want us to look at some of the teaching within the books I referenced earlier.

We'll go over a fairly detailed summary of Redeeming Productivity and, if time allows, we'll step through a few points from Ploductivity. The practical teachings from Atomic Habits and Deep Work are valuable, but only after you first get your mind right and your biblical glasses on through the theological teaching in the other two (which also have good practical guidance on the *how* questions baked into the very helpful preliminary examinations of the *why*).

By the way, for this book summary I'm pulling from a resource put out by Accelerate Books. (Because I'm verbose.)

AccelerateBooks.com is a site for Christians that offers "Summaries that keep you sharp for mission." They put it this way, "Join 10,000+ leaders using Accelerate Books to better steward their time, money, and ministry."

Basically, they have helpful book summaries from Christian authors for Christian readers. There are about 400 books in their library right now. While I recommend reading (and rereading) entire books, these summaries can be useful if you're looking to prioritize which books you want to invest time in or if you're like me today and want to share some succinct highlights without packing too much into the last lesson of an already very meaty course on Vocation.

3 Core Perspectives on Christian Productivity (and, yes, there's a difference – see Lesson 2)

1. **Your Life is Not Your Own** – The Christian concept of productivity is rooted in the realization that we belong to God.
 - a. **1 Corinthians 6:19b-20** – "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So, glorify God in your body."
 - b. "'It's my life,' is a radical and often rebellious mode of thinking. It's the attitude behind our insistence that we don't owe anything to anyone and that no one can tell us what to do" (p. 13).
 - c. This message is found in the movies we watch, the books we read, the songs we listen to...even the advice we give and receive from friends (sadly, both in and out of the church).
 - d. And, Rose says that it "is in the background of every secular work on productivity" (p. 14).
 - e. This lie tends to result in one of two errors with respect to productivity:
 - i. **Laziness and Apathy**
 1. "The first way 'it's my life' thinking can lead us astray is by causing us to believe productivity is entirely unimportant" (p. 14).
 2. This is the mindset of people who appear to be aimless and adrift. These people care little about getting things done or accomplishing much of anything, but they don't lack motivation.
 3. Rather, these people are motivated by the conviction that their life belongs to them. Thus, these people believe they are entitled to a life of leisure and pleasure.
 - ii. **Selfishness and Greed**
 1. "The second way 'it's my life' thinking expresses itself regarding personal productivity is in prioritizing productivity for the wrong reasons" (p. 15).

2. While the Christian pursues personal productivity because of the design of creation, the glory of God, and the hope of eternal reward, the non-Christian pursues personal productivity for very different reasons.
 3. The non-Christian seeks to be productive for selfish, short-sighted reasons.
- f. Rose says:
- i. "The motivation for working harder and getting more done was always so *I* could be happier, *I* could be more successful, or *I* could get richer. The focus was always on *me*."
 - ii. "The first pillar of productivity that must be redeemed is the origin of our productivity. The world says you belong to yourself. But the Bible says your life is a stewardship from God, a gift that must be used in service to God for His glory" (p. 16).
 - iii. "You simply cannot speak about productivity very long before talking about why we care about it" (p. 18).
 - iv. "The origin of a Christian's interest in productivity ought to be radically different from that of a person who does not know Christ" (p. 18)
 1. Side note: radically comes from radix, meaning root. "...must be rooted differently."
 - v. "Every philosophy of productivity contains a theology" (p. 18).
 1. And that's something I want us all to understand and never forget...
 2. Neutrality is a myth. You will never receive a non-biased thought. It's not whether, but which. There is always a worldview at play, and you need to be wise and discerning Christians, people of the Book, who test everything and cling only to that which is good (both root and fruit – both the what/how and the why).

2. You Exist to Glorify God – The Christian concept of productivity is driven by the glory of God.

- a. **WSC Q1:** *What is the chief end of man?* Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.
- b. Many personal productivity books are quick to get to goals as the key to productivity.
 - i. "Goals are great... But we need to start with a more fundamental question: Why? Why am I here? What is the higher purpose of all of my goals...? What is the ultimate point of being productive?" (p. 43)
- c. These questions reveal a fatal flaw in all secular approaches to personal productivity. They may be able to tell you **how** to set goals and **how** to accomplish them, but they will never be able to tell you **which** goals you ought to set and **why**.
 - i. "No productivity expert can tell you **what** your ultimate goal should be. The answer to that question must come from God" (p. 43).
- d. To be clear, this does NOT mean that Christians cannot learn and benefit from secular writers. It does mean, however, that Christians need to be honest about this reality:

- i. "If your favorite self-development guru is not a believer in Jesus Christ, then he or she does not share the same ultimate life goal as you" (p. 43).
 - ii. Additionally, Christians who uncritically adopt the systems of secular thinkers inevitable end up adopting the values of those same thinkers.
 - 1. **Luke 6:40** – "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher."
- e. Summing it up, Rose says, "Productivity flows from purpose" (p. 46)
- i. This means that Christians must understand who they are as image bearers and why God created them in the first place.
 - ii. Christian's must understand that man's chief end (our greatest and most fundamental purpose) is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.
 - iii. Only when we understand that God created us for His glory will we be prepared to think rightly about productivity.
- f. Some key quotes from the book on this:
- i. "Christians have a different value system from the world; we have a different purpose. And that should change how we approach everything in life, including our productivity" (p. 43).
 - ii. "When you follow the path of personal productivity to its logical conclusion, you always end up at religion" (p. 45).
 - iii. "Without knowing who you are and why you're here, there will be no controlling purpose that unites your productive efforts, no chief end to all of that toil" (p. 46).
 - iv. "When we talk about glorifying God, what we really mean is ascribing glory to Him. Glorifying God is regarding Him as worthy of praise" (p. 48).
 - v. "What you do is not your purpose, it's how you fulfill your ultimate purpose" (p. 50).
- g. Reflection questions:
- i. What might change in your work life if you worked as though your highest aim was to ascribe glory to God in your work?
 - ii. What about your family life? Your friendships? Your leisure? Your health?
3. **You Must Be Eternally Motivated** – The Christian concept of productivity is motivated and maintained by the hope of eternal reward.
- a. Matthew 25:14-30 (The Parable of the Talents) – "For [the kingdom of heaven] will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away."
 - i. "...Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And [the servant] who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five

talents more...[And] his master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

- ii. And so with the servant with two talents. But not so with the fearful servant who poorly stewarded his master's resources. To him, the master said:
 1. "You wicked and slothful servant! ... you ought to have [at least] invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest."
 2. "So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has more will be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."
- b. "If we want to redeem productivity, we need to understand that someday we will give an account for our lives to God. The world says to be productive so you can get more from this life. The Bible says to be productive so you can gain more in the next life" (p. 125).
- c. Before examining the heavenly rewards promised to faithful believers in this life and the next, it is worth noting the earthly rewards that motivate people to pursue productivity. Essentially, there are 4 earthly rewards chased by the world:
 - i. **Money:** "Most productivity books are geared toward business people ... the promise of secular productivity is a life of financial prosperity. Money is assumed to be the obvious incentive for productivity" (p. 127).
 - ii. **Peace:** This is the desire, not for wealth, but for control. People want to feel like they are in control of their lives, and people want to feel like they are not controlled by deadlines, commitments, and demands.
 1. Recall the prescient quote from **Francis Schaeffer**: "Humanism, man beginning only from himself, had destroyed the old basis of values, and could find no way to generate with certainty any new values. In the resulting vacuum the impoverished values of **personal peace and affluence** had come to stand supreme."
 - iii. **Praise:** Many are motivated by the desire to be recognized. This is especially true in ministry contexts where money is often scarce, and control is not possible. Many ministry leaders seek the praise of man.
 - iv. **Legacy:** "The fourth bad motivation for productivity is the lure of legacy. This motivation is just the praise of men in a more palatable form" (p. 129). Legacy is the praise of others that rebounds into the future.
 1. Remember Brad Pitt in the movie *Troy* (2004)? He played the Greek warrior Achilles in the cinematic retelling of *The Iliad*.
 2. There was a scene where two armies were facing off and Achilles was summoned to fight on behalf of his people against the greatest warrior from his enemies as proxies to spare the deaths of thousands.

3. A messenger boy was sent to call Achilles to the battle front and while he was suiting up to go fight, the boy said, "The Thessalonian you're fighting, he's the biggest man I've ever seen. I wouldn't want to fight him."
 4. To which, Achilles, the prideful, self-glory-seeking man that he was, replied, "That is why no one will remember your name."
- d. If these four rewards ought not motivate the Christian to productivity, then what **should** be the source of our motivation? Are we to stop seeking all reward? No!
- i. Rather than seeking an earthly reward, the Christian looks to an eternal reward.
 - ii. "You were made to seek reward, but it's not the reward of riches, peace, praise, or legacy that you were made for. These are all anemic half-forms of the reward you were made to be motivated by. In fact, if you look closely at each of these bad motivations, you'll notice a perverted version of eternal reward" (p. 130).

1. Christians seek treasure in heaven (**Matthew 6:19-21**)

- a. James says that our life is but a mist "that appears for a little time and then vanishes" (4:14).
- b. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18:

"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. **For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison**, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."

2. We seek the peace of being with Christ (**Philippians 4:4-9**)

- a. We're promised both the "peace of God" and the "God of peace."
- b. "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. **And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. **What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.**"

3. And, we seek the word of commendation from the Lord (**Matthew 25:21**)

- a. "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master."

e. Key Quotes:

- i. "God has presented heavenly reward as the proper motive for a Christian's productivity" (p. 126).
- ii. "Everyone is driven by something ... there's no such thing as an unmotivated person. The difference is just in *what* is motivating him or her" (p. 126).
- iii. "Everyone is driven by the promise of reward" (p. 127).
- iv. "God promises to reward us for our good works" (p. 131).
 - 1. Note: this is not a means to earn our salvation, but rather a response to His grace and love. Jesus plainly states in John 14:15 – "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."
 - 2. And God has revealed His covenantal love for us from the very beginning in the blessings promised from obedience to Him and the curses that accompany disobedience.
 - a. **Deuteronomy 28:1-2** – "And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all His commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God."
 - b. **Deuteronomy 28:15** – "But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all His commandments and His statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you."
 - 3. God had already saved His people and called them to be a people unto Himself. It was after that great and gracious salvation that He gave them the law of Moses and promised blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience.
- v. "I don't think Christians lack motivation because they are too heavenly minded, but because they are not heavenly minded enough" (p. 133).

4. Epilogue (Some Closing, Summary Thoughts)

- a. In all of our efforts to grow in personal productivity, we need to keep our humanity and our finitude in mind. These realities remind us that in our pursuit of productivity, we are doomed to fail.
- b. For one thing, we will fail at productivity because we are human. Simply put, "You're a creature, not the Creator" (p. 149). While God is certainly able to achieve all of His goals and aims, we are not.
- c. "Second, you are going to be sinfully unfaithful at times with your time, energy, and opportunities" (p. 150). That's not OK in terms of the sin, but it is okay in the sense that God has made provision

for sinners in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ. "By faith in Jesus Christ, we have forgiveness for our sins – past, present, and future" (p. 150).

d. Key Quotes:

- i. "When you take seriously God's call to be fruitful and redeem the time for Him, it's easy to beat yourself up when you inevitably fall short. So I want to leave you with this final peace of encouragement: You are going to fail" (p. 149).
- ii. "You are going to overcommit, you're going to break promises, you're going to fail to meet your goals, you're going to waste time, you're going to procrastinate, you're going to have unfinished to-do lists, and you will end many days feeling entirely unproductive" (p. 149).
 1. God is not thrown off course by our failures. He's God. He knew they were coming before we did. And He is able and willing to restore us to Himself and set us back on course to continue, as Eugene Peterson put it, our "long obedience in the same direction."
 2. **Romans 8:28** – "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

- e. **The Christian faith is a comprehensive worldview that impacts every area of our lives.** This certainly includes our work and our attempts to be productive. "Only when we have our theological foundation right can we start to build productive practices that truly honor God" (p. 12).