

# PERSPECTIVE

OCTOBER 2024

WHAT I  
WISH I  
KNEW



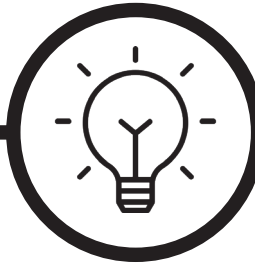
*ABOUT WORK & LEISURE IN MY 20s*



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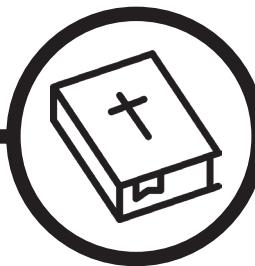
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in My 20s*  
**Brad Thayer**



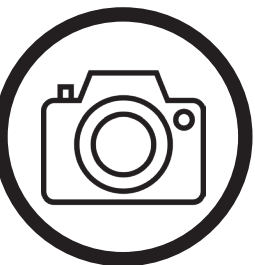
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## What I Wish I Knew About Work & Leisure In My 20s

“What I wish I knew about work and leisure in my 20s.” I must admit I’m not comfortable writing this article. I’m not introspective and, frankly, not interesting enough to do it well. What do you want to learn from *my* life? I’m forty-four years old, husband of twenty-one years, and father to four teenagers. I’ve lived most of my life in three cities. I started my vocational career at twenty-eight and have been at the same church the entire time. In my free time, I still enjoy doing things I did as a teenager. Trust me; I’m boring. Nonetheless, what I hope to offer below is faithful counsel from God’s Word and the lessons he’s taught me along the way.

I assume many of the people reading this are in their twenties. The first 5–10 years out of college are professionally and personally formative. Here’s my primary counsel to you in this formative season of life: take to heart the words of “the Preacher” from Ecclesiastes: “*Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun*” (Eccl. 1:1–2)? If you look for ultimate meaning, purpose, and satisfaction in things on earth, you will find it vapid and fleeting. Death steals your aspirations and crushes your accomplishments. You must walk in the fear of the Lord and put all “toil under the sun” in proper relationship to your Creator. You were made to know and enjoy God forever through his Son, Jesus Christ. Your work and leisure will be “striving after the wind” if not used to enjoy and glorify God for eternity (1:14).

These words resonate with me now as I’ve gotten older. I searched for greener pastures and found them wanting. I wrestled with discontentment and lost the match. The Preacher’s words are a splash of cold water. They awaken us to reality and properly orient us toward what we spend most of our life doing—working and then retreating for enjoyment. Hopefully, my reflections are instructive. I’ve had a few decades to learn how to joyfully accept the Preacher’s words. You will do well to take them to heart sooner rather than later.

### WORK

Ecclesiastes 2:18–19, “*I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity.*”

When we think about work in our twenties, we mostly think about establishing our professional careers. How can I get that job at the firm? Will management recognize my hard work? Will I eventually get promoted for putting in the long hours as an associate? The Preacher’s words helpfully teach us that, *eventually*, these things won’t matter. Someone will replace you and control what you labored to build. Whoa! Talk about a wake-up call.

I didn’t think about this in my twenties, but I wish I did. Here’s why. Here’s what I wish I understood then:

*Your career is a gift to be stewarded but not nearly as important as you may be tempted to esteem it.* During my first week in the office at Mount Vernon, a wise, former associate pastor (who served in my position before me) said, “Brad, you can’t out-work it. Don’t try. Trust me!” Sadly, it took me years—and some painful lessons as I neglected my own family—to learn just how right he was. I never thought I could “out-work” it. I simply thought my role was *so* important that it required all I was giving to it. If I didn’t work late into the evening, that initiative was going to fail. I constantly checked my email so that I wouldn’t miss anything important.

Looking back, the church was in a different season. There were unique challenges and demands that required extra time and effort. In some seasons, it is reasonable to work more. But that’s not what I’m talking about here. My issue was a heart issue—I esteemed my role as so important that I justified overworking. I also allowed the coercive effects of perfectionism to rob me of joy.

I wish I could go back to the day when that pastor gave me his advice. I would have said, “You’re right. The Lord gifted you with this position before me. I trust he’ll give it to someone else one day. So I want to steward it faithfully however long I may have it.”

Friend, enjoy the gift of your job. I pray it’s meaningful. But don’t esteem it too highly.

*Appreciate the importance of a strong work ethic.* Whether you’re in a corporate office in Midtown or your newborn’s nursery in your home in East Cobb, you quickly learn the importance of a good work ethic. The boss expects you to perform. That newborn requires more time and attention than you feel you can give. You must take responsibility and work hard, giving your all to ensure the job is done with excellence. Some seasons require early mornings and late nights. Some projects mean you don’t have “work/life balance” until the job is done. Some weeks, your child is sick, and you go multiple nights without sleep. Hard work is just that—hard work. And as a young Christian,

it's important to work with excellence and diligence even when it's hard because work is good in and of itself.

By God's grace, I learned this at a young age, growing up on a farm in east Tennessee. Farm living is not for the faint of heart, even if it's a hobby. The culture of farm life is such that your "fun" is working the farm. That meant slinging hay at 7am on a Saturday morning with my cousins or pulling tobacco in a cold barn with my uncle at 11pm on a winter's night. This wasn't optional. As a young man, I had to learn to work hard and not complain.

I didn't always enjoy this, and some things about this lifestyle are hard on families. Nonetheless, it taught me that it's satisfying to see a job completed. It is good to do your job with excellence and see the fruit of your labor. That work ethic proved invaluable in my twenties.

Friend, hard toil, if done right, is good and glorifies God.

*Be prepared for an identity crisis.* I experienced the same thing many people in their late twenties or thirties often experience now. It happens to young men and women after a few years of professional work experience. At some point, they question, "What in the world am I doing with my life?" For young mothers, it happens in the throes of the toddler years. They think, "I have a master's degree and had a professional career. Am I wasting my gifts being a full-time mother?" It's that fork in the road, that moment when you realize this is the culmination of everything you did after high school and begin to wonder, "Is this really all it is? Is this really what I want to do?"

Friend, if this is you (and I know it's not everyone), it's okay. For one, you're feeling the fleeting vanity the Preacher describes in Ecclesiastes. It's a healthy reminder that you're not defined by what you do but by who you are in Christ. It also reminds us that we can't always see the immediate fruit of our labor. This is a word to you, young mothers. That sales contract for that startup out of college may seem more meaningful than disciplining your inconsolable toddler. Just wait till they're 5 or 8 or 18. You'll be thankful for your labor of love now. Lastly, trust God's providence. What you're doing now likely won't be what you'll do forever. Work faithfully, pray, seek counsel from godly advisors, and then wait to see what opportunities and aspirations the Lord gives.

*Recognize that meaningful membership in a local church could be disruptive to your career path.* I felt called into vocational ministry at twenty. That set me on an unexpected path of pursuing formal theological studies in Louisville, KY. While there, I was a member and eventually a

lay-elder at Third Avenue Baptist Church. That's where the disruption began.

I, like most, assumed my church involvement would be temporary. Louisville and membership at Third Avenue were a stop along the way, not the destination. Then came the joy of being part of a church revitalization. The work was hard, but it was so great I began to set aside aspirations for full-time ministry just to stay at the church I loved deeply.

While a manager at Verizon Wireless, I met a Christian who was a VP of Louisville Slugger, the baseball bat manufacturer. We built a good relationship, and he gave wonderful professional advice for finding a successful career. I pursued it with some earnestness because it afforded me the opportunity to raise a family at Third Avenue. That was disruptive, especially for my wife, who patiently listened as I processed our future.

Here's my counsel: Be humble enough with your future (Jas. 4:13–17) to know that God may disrupt your career path to keep you at a local church. If he did it with someone like me, *who was giving his life to vocational ministry*, then he can do it with anyone.

This isn't a subtle way of saying stop looking at that job posting in another city to stay at Mount Vernon. There are great churches all around the world. Rather, don't be surprised by God! It's amazing how he turns hearts. You may find yourself searching for any reasonable job that will provide so you can stay committed to a specific congregation for decades.

## LEISURE

Ecclesiastes 2:1, "*I said in my heart, 'Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.' But behold, this also was vanity.*"

The Preacher wasn't just any vocational minister. He was "the Son of David" (1:1) and had "been king over Israel in Jerusalem" (1:12). Solomon likely wrote Ecclesiastes in his latter years as he reflected on his life and what ultimately mattered—"Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (12:13).

As king, all earthly riches and delicacies were at his disposal. Countless servants allowed him to spend his days in leisure on an estate nicer than any found in metro Atlanta. Singers entertained him for hours. No appetite of his flesh went unsatisfied (see Eccl. 2:1–8). Here's the thing—he tried it! All of it! He "said in [his] heart, 'I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.'" He enjoyed the

leisure and entertainment of the 1%. But at the end of the day—you guessed it—“this also was vanity.” His heart found no meaning by indulging in leisure.

The allure of self-indulgence in whatever leisure we can afford is common. With Solomon’s wisdom in my mind, I would go back and tell my younger self these things:

*Healthy disciplines are more sustainable if you start while you’re young.* When you’re young, you assume you’ll have the time, strength, or even life to do tomorrow what you put off today. I often looked at future horizons: “When I’m 35, I’ll watch my diet more. I’ll work out when the kids are older. When work slows down, I’ll go to bed earlier.” I reached many of those horizons, and some of those disciplines now characterize my life. I only wish I had established them much earlier. Let me mention two.

Time with the Lord in the morning begins the night before. If you struggle to get up in the morning for Bible reading and prayer, you’re probably not disciplining yourself to get to bed at a reasonable time. Turn off the TV. Stop scrolling on Instagram. Close your favorite YouTube channels. Put down the book and go to bed. The discipline of Scripture meditation and prayer will *not* get easier when you have kids or get promoted. So, start now.

Also, do some type of physical exercise. One day, in my office, a former member and Olympic athlete bent over and touched the floor with knees locked. You may think, “Of course he did. He was an Olympic athlete.” Yeah, but he was 90! That’s right! At 90 years old, he touched the floor with his hands flat on the floor and legs locked. I asked about his exercise routine. He said, “I’ve had many friends work their whole careers and never exercise. They retire and pick up their grandchild and throw out their back. Then they can’t do anything for the rest of their life. I resolved years ago that wasn’t going to be me. I swim, walk a few miles, stretch daily, and try to eat healthy. That’s it. And I get to do it with my wife.”

Admittedly, he had an unfair advantage as an Olympic athlete. Nonetheless, your body is a temple of God and a gift. Develop a discipline of exercise. Assuming God’s good providence, your future self will be thankful to have a stronger, healthier body to enjoy activities with your kids, to work with no pain, and to be involved at church.

*Recognize how easily your leisurely activities become part of your family’s leisurely routine.* Confession: I envy gaming families. You know who you are. You have a cabinet full of board games and decks of cards. You get rowdy on a Friday night over a game of Nerfs, slapping cards on the

table and yelling at your sibling. That’s not our family. We enjoy games, especially with friends. But you won’t find our family spending hours plotting attacks in strategy games. We’ve tried to be that family, but it never took.

I say this, particularly to young men and fathers. As the leader, what you enjoy will likely become what your family enjoys. It’s what you bond over and retreat to. It becomes the “Friday night family night.” It changes over time as kids get older and their sports and extracurricular activities increase. But it often starts with you, husband/dad. So, set good patterns. Model self-control. Be selfless. Ask what your wife or kids enjoy. Persevere when something is difficult at first (like kids complaining about games). Be flexible and willing to do something different if it doesn’t work (like when kids complain about games).

*Lastly, understand that hospitality is more rewarding and rejuvenating than you assume.* Some Friday nights deserve pizza and a movie. A tiring week should be rewarded with a cozy blanket and your favorite book. Some days have been too hard to then open up your home and engage in personal ministry.

When you’re in your twenties, particularly if you’re single, most of your free time is probably devoted to time with friends, recreational activities, or fun outings. Personal hospitality in your apartment is a one-off thing, maybe once a month. I know what you’re thinking. The latter is more work. It can be mentally draining. The former is relaxing and rejuvenating.

Let me encourage you not to underestimate the personal reward and rejuvenation gained from hospitality. This is *especially* important when you’re in your twenties. This is the prime time to develop the muscle memory of personal ministry before life gets busier.

I wish someone had warned me about the time demands of parenting teenagers. I assumed our hospitality would increase when we had teens. Boy, was I wrong! Teens demand more relational and emotional investment. Their school work, social lives, and extracurriculars have you always on the go. Our time for hospitality is now more selective and intentional because time is limited. But when we do it, we always say, “That was so encouraging!” We end the night spiritually encouraged and mentally rejuvenated. That’s always been our experience.

Friend, retreat to personal ministry. Make the rewarding and rejuvenating work of personal ministry part of your “leisure.”

## CONCLUSION

No one ever worked or ministered harder in his young, adult life than our Savior. Jesus's days were full of ministry to the disciples, preaching to the masses, home visits to the sick, dinner parties with tax collectors, and constant threats from religious leaders. Undoubtedly, he grew tired and needed to retreat. And he did. He sought time alone, in solitude. But he was never fully alone. He retreated to be with his Father in prayer (Mk. 1:35; Lk. 5:15–16).

The best counsel I would give my younger self is, "Follow Christ." Learn to walk nearer to God. Communion more closely with Jesus. Work to know him better and rest in him more.

— Brad Thayer



## Glory in the Ordinary

*Why Your Work in the Home Matters to God*

Written by Courtney Reissig

In *Glory in the Ordinary*, Courtney Reissig helps women find beauty and significance in their daily lives of working in the home. By walking through the American history of the stay-at-home wife and mother, Courtney helps her readers understand the biblical intent of work and encourages women at the end of every chapter with a “Getting Practical” section. As I read, I found myself saying, “Yes, me too! I have felt the same way!”

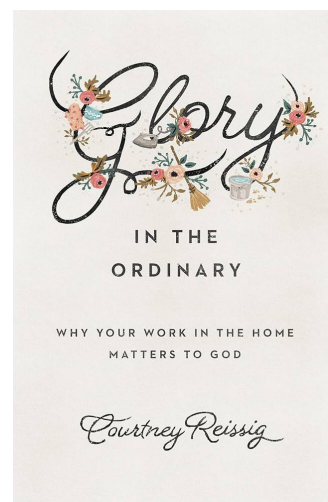
Reissig opens the book with a story of being asked by someone sitting next to her on a plane, “So what do you do for a living?” Fear bubbled up inside her as she pondered how to answer. Was she “enough” of a woman now that she had decided to stay home? Why did she feel the need to explain this decision to stay home with her children? By taking us through the cultural shift from working woman to stay-at-home wife and mother, Courtney sets the reader up to understand how God can be glorified in the ordinary tasks of working at home, especially if you once worked in the marketplace.

*Glory in the Ordinary* helped me understand the theology of at-home work and reminded me of my purpose in it. Reissig unpacks two ways we often misunderstand work: it must be paid and must accomplish something great to be meaningful. “Part of the reason we struggle so much with the work of the home is because, as Tim Keller says, we put a greater emphasis in our culture on the “knowledge” jobs instead of embracing the dignity of all work.” In response, Reissig writes, “Everything we do, whether it is work in the home or outside of the home, is imaging the God who made us to work.”

This book is very encouraging yet also very convicting. From chapter to chapter, I found myself convicted of the sin of idolizing work in the home and my selfishness in it. I needed to hear Reissig say, “In many ways, our goal is not to find a new purpose for our work but to recognize that the work we are already called to, the work that is right in front of us, is God’s good means of spreading his glory throughout the world. You are his image bearer, tasked with loving his fellow image bearers through the ordinary, faithful work that greets you every morning. This is for the good of the world” (136).

Whether you are a stay-at-home mother, a working mother, juggling a mix of both, or an empty nester, I highly recommend this book! It’s a compelling reminder that God’s presence and purpose can be found amid the most ordinary moments of our lives.

— Recommended by Katie Weaver



### Excerpts from the Book

## 1

[A]t-home work is more than just preparation for something beyond the little years. Often when the children are grown and gone, women struggle to see how the work of the home is still valuable.

– “It Takes A Village” p. 91

## 2

Not all moms have time to spare in the day. But some do, and the question we need to ask ourselves is, are we using that discretionary time for endless leisure or concentrated times of work and rest?

– “Miles to Go Before I Sleep” p. 107

## 3

While we may be clouded by our own sin and the overarching curse of life in a fallen world, our work hasn’t changed. It still serves the same purpose—worship of God, pointing back to God, and pointing us forward to the life that is coming.

– “Our Work Is Taking Us Somewhere”  
p. 140

## The Things of Earth

*Treasuring God by Enjoying His Gifts*

Written by Joe Rigney

In this creative, thorough, and practical book, Dr. Joe Rigney expounds and expands John Piper's Christian Hedonism theology into a new area of Christian life. Rigney exhorts readers to love God through loving the things of earth. We need to understand emphatically that we are not talking about sinful things but things like family, friends, food, hobbies, vacations, music, etc. Rigney dives into the tension many feel in wanting to find their joy in Christ alone and enjoying all the wonderful gifts God has blessed them with. His compelling discourse thoroughly answers objections to what might seem, at first, to be a very man-centered book. He carefully steers a course for the Christian who tends to fall into either the ditch of idolatry or the ditch of ingratitude.

Rigney exegetically explains that all of Creation, not just the Bible, is a story told by the Triune God and, rightly understood, is the constant and pervasive revelation of God. God is communicating Himself to us through His creation, and every enjoyment has the capacity to be, as C.S. Lewis said, a "tiny theophany," a touch from God's finger. In Scripture or the natural world, analogy and metaphor are the primary ways that God has chosen to reveal Himself to us. Created reality brings God's perfections home to us in visible, concrete, and particular ways, keeping God from being vague and indistinct in our minds.

This book was written for people who struggle with whether they love God's gifts too much and whether they love God enough. It seeks to help Christians who succumb to false guilt in enjoying the gifts of God due to a low-grade angst that creeps up and asks, "Am I enjoying God's gifts at the expense of finding my joy in Him alone? Is delight in the Giver and delight in His gifts a zero-sum game? Is it true that the more love I give to the gifts God has given me, the less love I have left for God Himself? As I grow to love God more, shouldn't the things of this earth, like my family, friends, good food, vacations... grow strangely dim?" Rigney's emphatic "no" and development of a very full theology of earthly joy provide comfort and reassurance to the believer.

— Recommended by Laurie Waddington



### Excerpts from the Book

## 1

[...] God created the world as a fitting overflow of his own love for and delight in the fellowship he enjoys in the Godhead. This fact must not be overlooked, as it's one of the fundamental arguments of this book. God's love for God led him to create the world from nothing. Therefore, our love for God, if it is to be an accurate reflection of God's love, must also lead us to a deep and profound and fitting love for creation. God's love for God pushes him into creation. So should ours.

– "Creation as Communication" p. 62

## 2

If we are properly (and perichoretically) integrating our joy in God and our delight in his gifts, then our enjoyment of the gifts ought to enhance and increase our love for God himself, and our love for God himself ought to enhance and increase our enjoyment of his gifts.

– "Rhythms of Godwardness" p. 125

## 3

We focus our primary attention on one thing at a time, whether God himself or the incredible diversity of the world. However, we never lose sight of the other, so that our communion with God enlightens our vision and engagement with the world, and our engagement with the world prevents God from remaining a vague and indistinct blur..

– "Rhythms of Godwardness" p. 132



# OCTOBER

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

October 1	2 Thessalonians 1	October 17	Romans 15:8–13
October 2	2 Thessalonians 2	October 18	Daniel 2:17–24
October 3	2 Thessalonians 3	October 19	Romans 15:14–21
October 4	Leviticus 20:22–26	<b>October 20</b>	<b>Romans 13:1–7</b>
October 5	Colossians 1:15–23	October 21	Romans 13:8–10
<b>October 6</b>	<b>2 Thessalonians 2:13–15</b>	October 22	Romans 15:22–33
October 7	1 Corinthians 15:35–49	October 23	Romans 16:1–16
October 8	1 Corinthians 12	October 24	Romans 16:17–24
October 9	1 Corinthians 13	October 25	Exodus 20:1–21
October 10	1 Corinthians 14	October 26	Romans 16:25–27
October 11	Genesis 2:1–9	<b>October 27</b>	<b>Romans 13:8–10</b>
October 12	1 Corinthians 15:1–34	October 28	Mark 4:35–41
<b>October 13</b>	<b>1 Corinthians 15:35–49</b>	October 29	Matthew 8:18–27
October 14	Romans 13:1–7	October 30	Luke 8:22–56
October 15	Romans 14:13–23	October 31	John 6
October 16	Romans 15:1–7		

\*Sermons in bold

# TAKE UP & READ

# NEW MEMBERS



**Steve  
Anderson**



**Jonathan &  
Lauren  
Branton**



**Des &  
Heather  
Collins**



**Preston &  
Lucy Eagan**



**Conner &  
Amanda  
Mayer**



**Parker  
McAlister**



**Ojas  
Mediratta**



**Devin &  
Kirsten Miller**



MOUNT VERNON

BAPTIST CHURCH