

Work - Wk 1

“You Need a Story”

6/27/21

Gen 1:26-28, 2:5-15

Introduction to Series

Tim. Pastor. Sup. **Genesis 1:26-28.**

It's gonna take us a little while to get there cause I want to set up where we're going for this series and then also for today in particular.

We are jumping into a new 6 week sermon series where we will be unpacking a “Theology of Work”. I don't know that I need to do much convincing for us that we need to talk about work. As a pastor, there are 3 main things I notice that I have conversations with a lot of people about: (1) Relationships (dating, marriage, sex, etc), (2) Money and (3) Work. Career, calling, vocation, all of that.

If you survey our church most of us, myself include are kind of in one of a couple different spots when it comes to work:

- **Some of us have no idea what it is we want to do in life.** We are working a job that pays the bills but we are still struggling to figure out what place we have vocationally in the world.
- **We are at the start of our careers.** We feel like this is where the Lord wants us, but now the rubber is hitting the road as far as getting our feet under us and started down this path.
- **We're pretty established in our careers,** maybe we've been in it for 5, 10, 15 years and we're starting to hit this point where we're asking ourselves - is this all there is? Is this it? I love my job, or at least like my job, it pays decently enough, is this my lot in life for the next 20, 30, or 40 years until I retire?
- **Many of us care deeply** about not only what we do, but how we do it. We genuinely want to apply our discipleship to Jesus into the area of work. But as soon as we step into the office or sit down at our desk it's like work becomes the all-encompassing thing and we feel like we left Jesus at the door.

So we want to answer the question over the next 6 weeks → **How do we integrate our faith and our work? How does our discipleship to Jesus affect our vocations? How do we redeem our labor?**

Now here's a few helpful things for you to know heading into the next 6 weeks:

1. **Resources page online: citizenscharlotte.com/work** - books, interviews, etc. One book I would really recommend - *Every Good Endeavor* by Tim Keller. (gonna quote him and this book quite a bit in this series)
2. **Biblical Theology vs. Book of the Bible** - This series is going to be a little bit different in regards to our teaching structure. Instead of picking one book of the Bible and working through it like we did last year with 1 John or with Ephesians, we're going to be looking at different passages throughout the canon of Scripture to show how the Bible holistically talks about the idea of work. *always preach the Bible
3. **WORK > 9-to-5** - When we use the word “work” in this series, we are **not just** talking about our 9-to-5, five-day-a-week jobs. One reason for that is that a lot of people's jobs don't even look like that anymore. But also because work is much bigger than that. For instance, one of my pet peeves is when people ask someone who is a mom, “do you work or do you stay at home?” While I know what they're asking there, do you see the dichotomy that that question operates out of? The implication there is that “staying at home with kids” isn't really work. And that is a very silly thing to think. Because anybody who stays at home with kids part-time or full time knows that it is very much “work.” So that throughout this series, when we say “work,” we're not just talking about those of us that have a full-time or part-time job, in the traditional sense of that word. I'm talking about whatever it is that we spend our efforts and energy and time towards doing. So if you're a stay-at-home parent, that's parenting. If you're a student,

that's going to class and studying. If you work a corporate job that's your 9-to-5. For all of us this is also other "work" we've been given responsibility over - paying bills, mowing the yard, cooking, etc. We're including all of that when we say "**WORK**".

Introduction to Sermon

Alright, that's the series setup and where we're heading.

Here's where we're starting for today - We need to realize that all of us, right now, are viewing our work through a **story**. Whether you love what you do, are already dreading tomorrow's alarm clock, or anywhere in between - we all view our work through some type of story, in order to make sense of it. We do this with all aspects of our lives, really, but we certainly do it with work.

Keller uses a great illustration to explain this: Let's say you're at the park and a total stranger comes up to you, looks you right in the eye and says, "the women have the sandwiches" and then he walks off. What you're going to do next is instinctively put that statement into a **story**. So one story could be that this gentleman thought you were joining for a church picnic and wanted you to know where the food was. Another story could be that there is a group of kind-hearted women on the other side of the park and they are giving out free sandwiches, and he wants to make sure you don't miss out. Or, the story could be that he's a secret agent and he thought you were his spy contact, and the code phrase for the meet up was supposed to be "the women have the sandwiches". Whatever story you put that statement into will determine your reaction.

The same holds true for your work. **Currently, right now, whether you realize it or not - you are viewing your work through a story.**

There is a narrative you are using to try and make sense of your work. A story that determines what **type** of work you seek, how you **think** about your work, how you **feel** each morning when you wake up, how you **interact** with your coworkers, bosses, employees, how much **effort** you actually put into your job. All of that is determined by the story in which we've placed our work.

I think you can take the majority of the stories we have to fit our work into and put them into one of two categories:

1. **Some of us work to live.** We go back all the way to Aristotle, 300 years before Christ, where he first declared that "leisure is the goal of all human behavior". The highest pursuit in life is leisure and luxury, so we work to pay the bills and enjoy the other parts of life that work pays for. We chant with 1980s Canadian rock band Loverboy - "Everybody's working for the weekend." We work to pay the bills and fund our vacations, weekend plans, and comfort items.
2. **Others of us live to work.** You scoff at the 9-to-5 ers. Work gives you purpose. At work you know who you are, you feel important, you feel meaningful and validated. You're prone to working late hours, taking your work home with you, deriving your identity from how well you're doing or not doing.

Both of these stories have good and bad, but neither are the Biblical invitations. As followers of Jesus, we're called to place our work into a new story - the true story.

We can put our work into the story of God which tells us what is true about ourselves and what is true about our work. And that story begins at the very beginning. Chapter 1, page 1.

Four Biblical Aspects of Work

Let's look at it together. **Genesis 1:26-28:** Fair warning we're going to be hopping all around Genesis 1 and 2 today.

[26] Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion (underline that word) **over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."** **[27] So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. [28] And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion** (same thing, mark that) **over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."**

Why do we exist as humans? What is our purpose? Well these 3 verses answer that question in a number of ways but one of the answers the text gives us is to **have dominion. The hebrew word here is "radah" meaning "To rule or to reign for the good of the one being ruled"**. Having dominion means to take responsibility for the good and flourishing of something.

It is king and queen language - Kings and Queens exercise dominion - they *rule* or *reign* over a part of creation. This is the Genesis language of work.

Chances are none of us talk like this when it comes to our Tuesday mornings though right? "What are you working on today? Oh you know just having dominion over some spreadsheets." "How did the meeting go? Oh you know just ruled over some calendars and strategic planning." Not the framework.

But this is the language the Bible uses for the task God gave to Adam and Eve in the garden. To take the portion of creation He had given them and to **have dominion** over it. To take responsibility for it. In other words a huge part of what we were created for as humans was to **have dominion and take responsibility for a portion of the world.**

Here's how author Richard Pratt puts it:

God ordained humanity to be the primary instrument by which his kingship will be realized on the earth. The great king has summoned each of us into his throne room. "Take this portion of my kingdom, he says, I am making you my steward over your office, your workbench, your kitchen stove. Put your heart into mastering this part of my world. Get it in order. unearth it's treasures, do all you can with it. Then everyone will see what a glorious king I am." That's why we get up every morning and go to work. We don't labor simply to survive, insects do that. Our work is an honor, a privileged commission from our great King. God has given each of us a portion of his kingdom to explore and to develop to its fullness.

God has given each of us a portion of his kingdom to develop, to have dominion over with Him. And according to Richard Pratt, and the Bible, this is an honor - a **privileged commission**.

And this is the first thing I want us to see as we reframe the story of work:

1) Work is a gift from God.

Look back at v 28 - **[28] And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion..."**

Work is a part of God's blessing on us as humans created in His image. **Work was a part of the blessing of God on humanity.** Let that sink in - work is a blessing from God. Some of you guys may have just thought - "Yeah but God wasn't talking about my job...my job, my coworkers...much more of a curse than a blessing." And to some degree - that may be true.

As we'll see next week - **work is cursed, but not a curse.** Work is a blessing. A gift from God pre-fall, pre-sin. God has given us a role to partner and rule with Him in having dominion over His creation. Part of the blessing pronounced on Adam and Eve as image bearers of God is the responsibility of work, dominion, and cultivation.

That's the first thing in our reframed story of work - **Work is a gift from God.**

Work is good for us

For the second, let's skip down to Genesis 2, same events as Genesis 1 just a slightly different viewpoint with more details.

Genesis 2:5ff:

[5] When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up — for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground. [6] And a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground — [7] then, the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. [8] And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. [And then look down at v. 15, that sort of summarizes what we just read] [15] The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

Adam was put in the garden **to work**. I don't know what your church background is, but I was a church kid through and through. And I don't know if it was conscious or not but over time hearing the story of Adam and Eve my picture of the garden of Eden - from Sunday school or maybe like my kid's Bible idk - was that the garden was like leisure paradise.

Which for me, the closest thing I can imagine it being like is like a Royal Caribbean cruise ship in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, sitting in a hot tub, drinking a Dos Equis. Just me? Alright, cool. But that was my picture of it. Adam and Eve, in the garden, laying in hammocks, chillin with God.

But notice - twice in this passage, v5 and v15 - God didn't create humanity to lay around in hammocks and drink strawberry daiquiris, but rather **to work**. God creates Adam and then gives him Eve that together they would work and have dominion.

That leads to our second thing:

2) Work is good for us.

Let me show you how I'm making that jump. This is pre-sin and pre-fall remember. Gotta keep that in the forefront. And this was all declared by God (Gen 1:31) to be very good. **God's very good design was a world in which Adam and Eve worked.**

So we know work must be good for us because of that. But we also know work is good for us because God didn't **need** Adam and Eve. He didn't give them work for His sake - like well i took this whole creation thing as far as I could get it so I gotta pass it off now. He gave it to them for **their sake**.

My dad and projects. Let me show you what I mean. My parents live in Lexington, SC and they come up to visit every couple of weeks. And when they come up to visit my mom and dad have separate priorities. My mom comes to see

Harper. My dad comes to fix things around my house. (He wants to see Harper too, but also he's got too much energy to sit still for that long).

Now here's a fun fact about me - I'm the opposite of a handyman. I don't know what that is, but it's me. You tell me to fix a sink, and I will somehow find a way to break it even more. I'm just not good with tools, my brain doesn't work like an engineer, and I don't enjoy it.

But my dad does this thing, which I've figured out in the last couple of years or so, where we'll be working on a project together, he'll help me get started, get the right supplies, and then he'll step back and go "you finish it, it's your house." Which usually makes me very sad. Because at that point I'd rather just be a good son and let him have all the fun.

Now he knows he could do it better. He knows it would go faster. He knows it would be less frustrating for both parties involved. But I also know he wants me to take some ownership over my house. To take pride in the work I accomplished. To own the space. To have dominion.

God doesn't create a fully formed world.

He could've placed Adam and Eve down in a fully formed city with culture, commerce, trade, food falling from the heavens as a continual gift from Him. But instead he created Adam and Eve and gave them work. And let's be honest, read the Bible, look at history - it goes much much better if God doesn't do that. But He knows it would benefit them to work. It is good for them to work.

This is why unemployment, for a lot of people, can be such a grueling, heartbreaking thing. This is why disability can be not just a physical hardship, but also a mental one. This is why all the data shows that when people can't work anymore, the rates of depression tend to skyrocket. Because work is actually good for us. It's a good thing for us to do. Not just for the companies we work for or the people our work benefits, but also for us personally.

Work is good for us.

Work is cultivation

Let's go back to where we left off before. Genesis 2:10:

[10] A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. [11] The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. [12] And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. [13] The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. [14] And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

What is going on here? Is this just a bunch of helpful geographical information? Why all of the details? The point I would argue, and not just me but a number of Hebrew scholars, is that the goal of Moses including these details is showing us that Eden was full of raw materials. It has water, earth, stone, minerals, building materials, and other natural resources.

Eden had all sorts of *potential* within it - it was just waiting for Adam and Eve to be put there by God to make it all into something. Which leads to our third aspect of the story of work:

3) Work is cultivation.

Work is taking the unorganized, unstructured materials in our world and reshaping them into something beautiful and useful to the world.

Tim Keller says it this way: **Work is rearranging the raw material of God's creation in such a way that it helps the world in general, and people in particular, thrive and flourish.**

In other words - work is bringing order to chaos. This is what work does. No matter what type of work you do:

- **Farmer** - takes soil and seed and water and rearranges it into crops for people to eat and enjoy.
- **Accountant** - takes numbers and data and information and rearranges them into calculations and spreadsheets and projections
- **Graphic designer** - takes lines and colors and shapes and fonts and rearranges them into something coherent and helpful
- **Barista** - takes coffee beans and milk and matcha and morning sleepiness and brings us out of the mind fog chaos.
- **Educator** - takes ideas and concepts and math equations and grammar rules and rearranges it into curriculum and lessons to teach and mold students.
- **Parents** - takes a baby and diapers and snacks and activities and disciplines and organizes them together to develop and cultivate a functioning human being.

Now just to clarify - this is what **good work** does. Not all work cultivates. Some work doesn't do this at all. The sex industry doesn't: it actually tears down marriages and relationships and creates addictions in people. Predatory lending doesn't do this: it actually takes advantage of people and makes them worse off than they were before. So some work is destructive to people and society.

But all good work, all work that is worth doing is cultivation. It's harnessing the raw materials and potential of the world, and making something beautiful and/or useful out of all of it.

Which is what God invites humans into. Look back at v 28 again - **[28] And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion..."**

This verse is referred to often by theologians as the **cultural mandate**. It's the call on humans given by God not just to multiply by having some kids and filling the earth with more image bearers of God, but to cultivate. **To subdue, which in this case means - to bring it in line. To bring it into order.** In other words to make something of the raw materials around us.

I love the way author Nancy Pearcey says it. She says, **"The first phrase, be fruitful and multiply, means to develop the social world. Build families, churches, schools, cities, governments, laws. The second phrase, subdue the earth, means to harness the natural world. Plant crops, build bridges, design computers, and compose music. This passage is sometimes called the cultural mandate because it tells us that our original purpose was to create cultures, build civilizations. Nothing less."**

When you think of Eden, don't think of a well manicured city park. Think jungle wilderness. Adam and Eve were called to tame it. Create paths and dwellings and spaces for crops to grow. There are all kinds of potential in it, but that potential hasn't been realized yet. And God gives this work to humans. To come along and harness it, tame it, make it liveable, bring out everything it can be.

Joining God

Work is a gift from God. Work is good for us. Work is cultivation - bringing order to chaos.

For our last part of the story, head back to Gen 2:15 one last time: **[15] The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.**

One Hebrew scholar described this Hebrew word for “work it”, as **“actively partnering with God to take the world somewhere.”**

4) Work is joining God in taking the world somewhere.

The story of God starts in a Garden. God gave Adam and Eve co-rulership over his creation, calling them to have dominion, to cultivate, to make something of the world. To join Him in the work He has already started.

And if you fast forward all the way from the first two chapters of the Bible - Gen 1+2 - to the last two chapters - Revelation 21 and 22 - here's what you'll find: One day in the future King Jesus will return and God will make everything as it should be. You see so much of the same Genesis imagery - rivers, the tree of life, and the people of God ruling and reigning forever with God. The curse of sin is no more. Jesus has won the victory through his life, death, and resurrection.

So in many ways where we're headed is a more glorious version of the beginning.

But there's one very important difference: In Genesis the world is a garden, in Revelation it is a garden-like city. A city called the “New Jerusalem”. So there are walls and gates and streets and homes and architecture and culture...and **work**. There will be work in the new creation. Uncursed, yes. As it is meant to be yes, but still work.

You see, the garden of Eden was never supposed to remain a garden. It was always supposed to become a city. So God didn't just give us work to do to keep us busy—he gave us work to do to join him in creating the world. And the way it gets there is by you and I, partnering with God to take the world somewhere.

So when you wake up tomorrow morning, roll out of bed, and head into whatever work God has placed you in - you're not just punching the clock, you're not just earning a paycheck, you're not just changing diapers, you're not just working for the weekend - **You are partnering with God in taking the world to His desired ends.**

- You aren't just an administrative assistant - you are partnering with God to take the world to His desired ends, through the work of administrative assisting.
- You aren't just parenting - you are partnering with God to take the world to His desired ends, through raising healthy, thoughtful, Jesus loving humans.
- You aren't just helping people get health insurance - you are partnering with God to take the world to His desired ends, through helping people get the medical care they need to take care of their physical bodies.

With every meeting, every interview, every task, every class, every budget, every proposal—you are joining God in cultivating the earth. In organizing and leveraging the raw materials he gave us to take the world somewhere with him.

If I could close here as we get into this series - in order for you to redeem your labor, to bring the gospel to bear in your work and make work meaningful in your life - you don't need a new job, a higher salary, to work in ministry, a new boss, better coworkers - **you need a new story.** You need to see your work the way God sees it: with purpose, with dignity, with meaning, and with value. A gift from Him, good for you, cultivating order out of chaos, and joining God in taking the world somewhere.

Conclusion

Questions on screen to help people connect their work to God's story:

- Who or what does my work benefit?
- In what ways is the world a better place as a result of my work?
- What would or wouldn't happen if I (and people like myself) didn't do my work?
- How does my work bring order out of chaos?
- How does my work reflect God?

CG Questions:

1. Read Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:5-15 and recap the sermon. What stood out to you? What comforted you? What convicted you?
2. Take a second to go around the room and have each person share their current "work". How are they feeling going into this series and what are they hoping to learn?
3. Take the rest of group time to work through some or all of these questions with people's work. Have the person lead, and the group help discern:
 - a. Who or what does my work benefit?
 - b. In what ways is the world a better place as a result of my work?
 - c. What would or wouldn't happen if I (and people like myself) didn't do my work?
 - d. How does my work bring order out of chaos?
 - e. How does my work reflect God?
4. Pray that the members of Citizens would learn to view their work through the story of God, viewing it as a good gift in which they cultivate the world and join God in His redemptive purposes.