



GOOD JOB

YOUR WORK MATTERS

Most of our life happens outside of church, and for many of us that means it happens at work. Some have careers in the workforce, others have work to do at home with family or volunteering in retirement. Your work matters to God. Your job can be glorious if you glorify God in your job.

“Good job.” That’s a phrase we all like to hear, isn’t it? Good job. It means we gave it our best effort and actually succeeded at the task, or close enough! What a great feeling. Even better though will be that comment Jesus used in one of his parables: “Well done, good and faithful servant.” “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’” (Matthew 25:21). We are starting a new series. What you might call a “faith and work” series. How does faith apply to work? Does God care about my job? Now, a lot of you might be thinking, “I’m retired! Great! I get to take six weeks off church.” I would advise against that. You may be retired, but you are still at work in this world—have you noticed? Or, you’re saying, “I’m a stay at home parent; this has nothing to do with me.” Or “I’m a student.” Listen, when I say work matters, for some of us work is a place we go and log our time and draw our pay and all that. But it’s much bigger. Work is whatever you are doing regularly with your time and energy. Raising kids. Keeping home. Volunteering. Your work matters. Your work matters to God. And your work, your job, can be glorious if you glorify God in your job. This series applies to every one of us. The only ones I’d exempt are that bunch in the nursery. The only work they’re doing is working on filling those diapers. That’s another story. But for the rest of us, your work matters.

The goal of this series is to get you thinking about God and his purposes for you outside of this hour of worship. We give this hour to God in worship. But what about the other 167 hours of the week? Is God involved there? Does God care about your job? For too long, the church divided spiritual work and secular work as if you have to be a monk or a priest to serve God. Martin Luther and John Calvin restored the dignity and meaning of work outside the church. But we still get stuck in wrong thinking. We set our identity on our work and get too involved. We try to prove ourselves in our work. We think of work as what we do to earn money and gain leisure. I work to not work. Working for the weekend! There’s the old tale about the businessman on vacation who meets a poor fisherman sleeping on his boat pulled up on the beach and says, “Why don’t you get motivated and do something with your life?” “Why?” says the fisherman. “So you can succeed, and make money, and one day retire and maybe buy a boat you can pull up on the shore, and take a nap ... in the sun ... on a paradise beach ...” Work to not work doesn’t work. Neither do these other wrong-headed ideas.

We get stuck even when we do try to apply God to work,

like work matters to God if you use it to promote justice and virtue. Well, some of us are in positions to do that, but many are in jobs that don’t give that kind of opportunity. Work matters to God if you use it as a platform for evangelism. Well, I sure want you to see every sphere of influence you have and every relationship you are in as an opportunity for the Gospel, but that can’t be the only reason you have the job you have or use the time you use to do the things you do. What are we doing and why does it matter at all? I’m telling you, your work matters. Your work matters to God, and your job can be glorious if you glorify God in your job.

It’s a big question, and that requires a big answer, so we are starting this series back at the beginning. And when I say the beginning, I mean the beginning. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). Now, since we are in Creation, let me just say, young earth, old earth, theistic evolution ... you’re thinking people. Find a theory you can accept and move on, and humbly give room for others because you don’t really know either! But the most important thing is that God created. “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth.” We are not the product of impersonal forces or a great cosmic accident. We were made by God. And that’s the point. Made. God made. The verb used is one of the words regularly used in Hebrew to describe work. God fashioned. God made. God ‘artisans’ if I could make that a word. God worked. And, God delighted in His own work. He sat back again and again and said, “It is good!” This stands alone in ancient stories of the origin of things. Most ancient worldviews see the material world as an accident or the incidental product of a divine battle. Our Bible says God made the world, and meant to, and loved it. God worked. God delighted. Then God rested. We’ll get back to that.

As the passage goes on through creation, we get to our Scripture for today. The tone and the pattern changes as God gets very personal now, leans in and makes us. “Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground’” (Genesis 1:26). It isn’t the impersonal “God said, let there be.” We enter into God’s own thinking; His own self-counsel. “Let us.” People wondered for years how this could be plural. Hebrew doesn’t have a royal “we.” It makes no sense that God is talking to heavenly host here; we aren’t made in their image. The Trinity is hinted at. God decides to make us. “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule...” Then verse 27: “So God created mankind

in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27).

The image of God is its own huge idea. It could be its own series. Because of the image of God, every person has dignity, every person has inherent worth and should not be dismissed, demeaned or damaged. Every person has creative ability. Every person has capacity to rule and exercise authority. Every person has intelligence and self-awareness. It's a big deal. But let's focus in on work. "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground'" (Genesis 1:28). God blessed them and said these things to them. God blessed us and said now rule, now subdue, now exercise your role, do your job. God blessed and set us to work. Work is not a curse, it is a blessing. God made us to work. It's in our very nature. It's how we were made in his image. It's part of the very core of what it means to be a human being. We were made to work and our work matters to God.

"Fill the earth and subdue it" means more than procreation and population. It means we have a role to play in bringing the world around us into its full potential. This is not a license to exploit the natural world. It is a responsibility to find and play the role we have to play in God's order. "Rule over" the beasts means more than training your dog to sit. It means we have a place at the very top of the natural order, and the fish and birds and dogs and whales and ring-tailed lemurs, they all to some degree depend on us to thrive. This is different from the pristinization of nature, the environmentalism that says we should never touch, never intervene, never bother. This is a doctrine of creation care. But more than that, it is the very foundation of every single thing we do under the category of life we call "work."

Let me move on, then make some summary points.

"Then God said, 'I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food'" (Genesis 1:29). We get to eat plants. Don't worry, in Genesis 9 we get meat. Genesis 1 is the Impossible Whopper. Genesis 9 is the Big Mac. Then in Acts 10 we get the bacon double-cheeseburger! Some of you know what I'm talking about. Glory to God. But do you see that we are set over creation? "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day" (Genesis 1:31). All of this is in the category of goodness. Blessing. Rightness. Later comes the curse. The very next thing that happens if you look down the page is that God rests. God doesn't need rest. Why did

God rest? The model is work and rest. Not work in order to rest. Not rest in order to recover for more work. Work and rest. Work and rest. This is the pattern.

So, we want to say, your work matters to God. What I want you to see this week, as we just scratch the surface here is this: Work was made by God and given to us as a good gift. Work is a good thing. You were made to do work. But work is now very hard, frustrating and sometimes unfulfilling. Why? Well, as Genesis goes on, we see that Adam and Eve—or you and I within them, mankind—disobeyed God and fell from the perfection of the Garden into the curse of the world in which we now live, and part of that curse affects our work. Look at chapter 3. Adam and Eve have been disobedient. They have disregarded God's authority, disobeyed God's command and tried to set themselves up as their own gods, so relationship with God is broken, and the ability to stay in the Garden eating from the Tree of Life is all gone now and God says, as part of all these consequences: "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return'" (Genesis 3:17–19). That sounds like work, doesn't it? That's the work I know. Work, for us, is frustrating, difficult, harder than you think it should be, and incomplete. You never get it done. There's always more to do. And you are rarely sure what you are accomplishing. But, even still, you were made to work. You find meaning in it. Your work matters, and your job can be glorious when you glorify God in your job.

So, let me just summarize five points to think about as we get into this. Faith and work; your work matters to God. What do we learn from Genesis? (1) God made the world in need of work. We see that from the beginning. God didn't just make a world all set and finished, and pop it into being. God created formless and chaotic matter, then leaned in to work it and fashion it. The world God made needs work, just as God intended. (2) God worked and rested and delighted in both. Work is not inherently a curse or burden to escape as fast as you can. Even God works. (3) God made you in His image to continue in His work. The term we use here is "vice-regents." In the ancient world, rulers set up images, icons of themselves, to demonstrate that their authority and influence stretched into that country or region. We carry the image of God. We have a role to play exercising God's intent. Our work is something like that; it is rooted in that. In fact, it is most fulfilling when it follows closely along that God-ordained design.

Work is at its best when, as Tim Keller writes in “Every Good Endeavor,” “It 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. Whenever we bring order out of chaos, whenever we draw out creative potential, whenever we elaborate and ‘unfold’ creation beyond where it was when we found it, we are following God’s pattern of creative cultural development.” We work in the image of God. (4) Work is frustrating and incomplete because of the Fall. (5) God did not make us to produce work but made work to produce people. God is after our character development, not our profit margin. We will have to come back to this, but this is at the heart of why all work at any level can be glorious. Its true purpose is to reflect God and bless and serve neighbor. You can be a fortune 500 CEO or a teacher or a laborer or a soldier, or whatever. Your job can be glorious when you see it as an opportunity to bring meaning and order to the world God made, and to serve the good of those around you.

Well, this is the tip of the iceberg. Your work matters. You were designed to be at work in this world. There is deep meaning to it. You were called to it. Jesus modeled this for us. We don’t get any time in His carpenter’s workshop in Scripture, do we? Although that’s where He spent most of His adult life. We don’t get to watch Jesus go about His labors. I suspect He was pretty good at it. But even more, I suspect He glorified God in His work, and I suspect His work was a blessing, useful to those around Him and valuable. I suspect His job was glorious as He glorified God in His job. The key to a fulfilling engagement with work is to see that God is involved. God has you there for a reason. In fact, God may have called you to it—the best jobs are those you can confidently say God called you to. Jesus modeled this. He said once, “I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me” (John 14:31). Or, “‘My food,’ said Jesus, ‘is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work’” (John 4:34). His work. Your job is glorious when you glorify God in your job. God has purposes for you in your labors. There was a pastor a generation or so ago named Dick Halverson, and he used to offer this as a benediction. First Pres has shared this before, but I want to use it to close today. The Halvorson Benediction goes like this: “You go nowhere by accident. Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God has put you there. God has a purpose in your being there. Christ lives in you and has something he wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in the grace and love and power of Jesus Christ.” Amen.

STUDY GUIDE

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Genesis 1:26–31

UP: UP: Connect with God through Spending Time in His Word

Read aloud the passage for the week: Genesis 1:26–31.

Allow a few moments to silently reflect on what you heard. Underline or note any words or phrases that seem meaningful.

- 1) Reread verse 26. What does it mean to “rule over?” Describe examples of good “rulers” and bad “rulers,” either from history, books or movies.
- 2) Reread verse 27. What do you think it means to be created in the image of God?
- 3) Reread verse 28. God’s first interaction with humanity is to give them a specific mandate. How does this compare to how our world typically talks about the purpose of human life?
- 4) Reread verses 29–30. What can we learn about how humanity is supposed to interact with creation from these verses? What does it look like to be responsible with the things God has entrusted to our care?
- 5) How does this passage help you consider how your work and faith interact?

OUT: Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)

Name a place that God has called you to join in His mission. Your workplace? Your home? Etc.?

IN: Connect with Each Other

Take some time to pray for our church. God has called First Pres to be light and life for the city. Pray that we would live out this calling, recognizing that we are all uniquely positioned to participate in God’s mission in various ways.