

The Design of Work

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[0:00] Well, this week we are starting a new series in the Sunday School on work. And we are going to be using this book, Every Good Endeavor, Connecting Your Work to God's Work by Timothy Keller.

We'll probably give you an opportunity to purchase that book sometime or at least point you in the right direction for those. So, a series on work, what we do for a living.

So, let me begin with a question, just a survey question. What do you do for a living? If you work, what do you work at?

Let's hear some answers. Being a good wife. Very good. What else? Raising children in the fear of the Lord. Very good.

Men. Providing money. What do you do? I'm an accountant. An accountant. Very good. What else? Have you forgotten?

[1:10] You'll be there tomorrow morning. Oh, no you won't. Wow. Very good. Labor Day. Work at an army factory.

So, loans that love pockets. Just whatever. New designers. Okay. Very good. What else? Sales person. Sales person. Very good.

What else? Construction work. Construction. Truck driver. Truck driver. Roger. Service technician. Water coolers. Service connection.

Something in water coolers. Very good. What else? Stan? Human resources. Human resources. He takes care of all of you people. What else? Yes, Billy.

I count. You count. I count money. Oh. Very good. Count money. What else? Work at a chicken.

[2:07] Mark is a chicken man. All right. What else? Mike. Graphic artists. Graphic artists.

Very good. We have mechanics. Graphic artists. Construction people. We have teachers. Pastors. All sorts of people.

Well, that's what we spend most of our time doing, isn't it? Working. At least eight hours a day, probably. But it's interesting.

We spend so much of our time working, and yet how work relates to our faith and what it means to be a Christian at work is not always the easiest thing to think about, to figure out.

I'll just give you an example from my life. I worked one time at a factory where I finished off car parts, and so I had to put a clip in this one car part. I had to trim some extra plastic, and I did some gluing.

[3:08] And there were days when I did that for eight hours. How do you do that as a Christian? What does it mean to do that as a believer in Jesus Christ?

How does that relate to my faith? It's not the easiest thing to think about. So what does it mean to be a Christian at work? There's lots of different voices, even in the Christian community, that says different things.

Some Christians would see work as mainly a way of promoting social justice, of social harmony and well-being. And so how you do business as a Christian should reflect the fact that we need to love and care for the people that we live with.

And so it certainly means that to some extent. Other Christians say work is mainly a place, or they see work as mainly a place to witness for Jesus Christ.

Your workplace is a mission field. That's how they would primarily think of their work. And I would ask, yeah, that's true. Is that all that the Bible teaches about work?

[4:18] Historically, Lutherans, following in Martin Luther's trail, put a lot of stress on the dignity of work. It's through work that God cares, feeds, takes care of, protects, shelters, and supports humanity.

He gives us these things, but it comes through work. It goes through human labor. And so Lutherans would often say that we are being the fingers of God. We're his agents of providence, of care.

And so for them, work is mainly about providing. People in the historic reform position. And so by that I mean it's that wide stream of theologians that followed in Calvin's train that they were primarily in Holland and that area.

They say, no, we need to have a bigger picture. When God calls us to work, he calls us to create culture. And so work is not just providing for ourselves.

It's actually creating culture. And so now it includes arts and music and teaching and everything.

And so for them, work is making culture.

[5:37] Now that's a lot bigger perspective than some of the others. Well, there's different answers then. And as long as people are saying this is the main thing that work is about, well, we're going to have a hard time figuring it out.

Because it can't be the main thing about four or five different things. The main thing for them has to be the main thing. And if they're saying it's mainly about this or it's mainly about that, well, then they're not agreeing with each other.

So it's a hard thing to think about. And then there's the problem that we just talked about. We have different jobs. We have different jobs here. So we have a construction worker and we have a salesperson.

What does it mean to be a Christian as a construction worker than as a salesperson? If you're a Christian and you work at a fast food restaurant, and what does that look like?

And then how does that differ from I'm the owner of a chain of fast food restaurants? You know, there's different questions. There's different problems. There's different things that you face.

[6:48] And so it's not easy to give a one-size-fits-all answer for what it means to integrate, to put together our Christian faith and work. And then another thing that makes it so difficult to come to grasp and understand what it means to be a Christian at work is that work is one of the primary places where we feel how frustrating it is to live in a sinful world.

We're going to be going back to the book of Ecclesiastes in the coming weeks in this hour. But if you remember, Ecclesiastes is all about living under the frustration of sin and death.

And again and again in the book of Ecclesiastes, it talks about work. Work is one of the places where we feel that frustration, where we feel the work of sin and death in our lives.

And so when all that comes together, different jobs, different ideas, then you mix in the fact that there's frustration and sin and death in our work.

It's difficult to know exactly how we are to work, how we are to spend those eight hours a day, those 40 hours a week minimum as believers in Jesus Christ.

[8:19] Well, God doesn't leave us without help. The Bible is full of wisdom. It's full of resources and hope and help for people who are trying to work, for people who are looking for work, people who are going to work, for people who are succeeding at work, for people who are failing at work, for people who are frustrated at work.

The Bible speaks into our falling condition, and it speaks in this area of work. And so today we're going to begin this series, and the lesson is entitled, The Design of Work.

The Design of Work. And we are starting at the beginning. And by the beginning, I mean all the way at the beginning, back in Genesis. So if you could turn in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 2.

Genesis chapter 2. Now, I have five points this morning that we are going to go over.

And the first is that in the beginning, there was work. So first point is, in the beginning, there was work. The Bible starts talking about work as soon as it starts talking about anything.

[9:40] So let me read Genesis chapter 2, and then verse 2. By the seventh day, God had finished the work he had been doing.

So on the seventh day, he rested from all his work. When God created the world, he did what? What did he do?

What was he doing? He was working. He was working. Moses describes God's creation as work. The same word that talks about our work.

And you see that in verse 15, if you go down there. The Lord God took the man, and he put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. So in the beginning, there was work.

God was working. Man was working. Now let me ask you. What are some of the lessons that we can learn just from that about work?

[10:45] It's good. It's not necessarily evil. Work is not a curse. It's not part of the curse. It was before the curse. What else? We were created to work, and work is being part of being made in the image of God.

Yeah. To work is to be like God. Work is godly. So Genesis paints creation as God going to work. Going to work. And that's in stark contrast to almost all the other stories that were told about work and about the creation of the world. Almost all the other stories of creation in the ancient world depict creation as a struggle between cosmic forces.

And so instead of work, creation was about war to the other people. So in the Babylonian creation story, the god Marduk fought this goddess named Tiamat, and out of her corpse, he formed the world.

So that's what the stuff of this world is, is the leftovers of this goddess Tiamat. In the Norse story of creation, in the beginning, so we're talking about the Vikings, in the beginning there was fire and the ice, and that represents chaos.

[12:12] And out of the fire and the ice came this gigantic frost giant named Ymir, and he was an emblem of chaos. And three brothers, Odin, V, and Vili, attacked him and killed him.

And then Odin, out of his body, out of his flesh, he made the earth. Out of his bones, he made the mountains. And out of his blood, he made the seas.

There's a lot more to the story, but you get the picture. Creation, for them, was war. And even evolution, the modern myth of creation, is the story of war and conflict.

It's the survival of the fittest. It's only in the Bible that creation is not conflict. Because God does not have any rivals. Creation isn't the aftermath of a bloody battle.

It's a craftsman going to work. So, before Jesus ever went to work in Joseph's workshop, he had a far bigger workshop that he worked in.

[13:23] It was the world. So, in the beginning, God worked. Work was not necessarily evil. It wasn't a thing only for the poor to do. God himself worked.

So, work has this very exalted beginning. I think this corrects some of our thoughts and ideas about work.

It's this very exalted beginning. Now, secondly, that's our first point. In the beginning, there was work. Now, here's our second point. How God works. So, we've seen that work comes from God because God does work.

Now, secondly, how does God work? First of all, God works with delight. No one makes God go to work. He went to work because he wanted to.

For the sheer joy of it. No one made him work. He worked because it pleased him. So, Genesis chapter 1 is this great song with this refrain happening again and again.

[14:24] And God saw, and he looked, and he saw that it was good. He saw that it was good, and he saw that it was good. And then when it's all done, he said, it's very good.

So, each part was good. But then when God looked over the whole of his work, he said, this is very good. He delighted in his work.

So, he works with delight, but he also works with care. He's a careful worker. And you can see this in a number of ways. God put man in the garden.

And it soon became apparent that Adam didn't have everything he needed. So, he put Adam to sleep. He brought forth a woman. And God cared for Adam in that way.

In chapter 2, Genesis 2, 6, you see that it says, God made streams come up from the earth and water the ground and the plants.

[15:28] So, the plants needed water. God took care of the plants. He takes care of man. He provides for the plants. Psalm 104 says, he gives food to all he has made.

Psalm 145 says, he cares for every living thing. So, God doesn't just create. That's part of his work. But, the other part of his work is he cares for his creation. That's why Jesus could say, even to this day, my father is working.

I see what my father is doing. And he cares for the creatures. And so, I care for you. So, God is working all the time to provide for his creatures. And in that sense, he never has a day off.

Every day is a day for him to work. Yes, he created and rested on the seventh day. He rested from his creating work. But he never rests from his caring work.

[16:30] His loving and providing work. And I think that teaches us how that we are meant to keep the Sabbath as well. I don't want to go there, but if you could think about that.

The Sabbath is a day of rest, but also it's a day for mercy and love and caring for people. So, how does God work? With delight, with care, and then with man.

He works with man. He delegates work to others. One of the first things that he does is give man work to do. Can someone read Genesis 1.28 for us?

Can someone read that out for us? Go ahead, Dennis. Fill the earth and subdue it.

Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground. Very good. So, God gives man work to do right away.

[17:32] Man has to subdue the earth. So, everything is good. Now, this is an interesting picture. Everything is good, but it still needs subdued.

It still needs developed. See, outside of the garden, I think what the picture is, outside of the garden, it is still undeveloped. It's still, it's good, but it's undeveloped.

It needs subdued, and it needs to be brought into harmony with the garden. It needs to be brought into harmony with the place where God meets with man.

So, I think we are missing something if we think that Adam and Eve merely just strolled around the garden all day and ate fruit and did nothing.

There was work to do, and it wasn't necessarily a stroll in the park. There was no sin, but that does not mean there was no effort required.

[18:27] God worked with delight and with care, and he worked with men. Men had a job to do, and it required their minds and their hearts and their hands.

So, we've seen that in the beginning was work. We've seen how God works. He works with man, with care, with delight. And now the third point, the goodness of our work.

The goodness of our work. Work comes from the hands of a loving God. It's a good and a perfect gift as it comes from his hand. Number three is the goodness of our work.

And again and again, Genesis leaves us with this truth that work was a part of paradise. It was a part of Eden. And again, this is not like the other world views.

This is not how the pagan world thinks. This is not how people in our culture think about work. The Greeks thought that in the beginning, there was this era, this age of leisure where the gods and men sat around and ate fruit all day and enjoyed themselves all the time.

[19:41] It was only when later that work came in. And that is just a reflection of the story that man keeps telling themselves, the lie that they keep telling themselves.

That if I only didn't have to work, then my life would be good. If I just didn't have to go to work, then my life would be good.

So you see the same thought, you see the same belief in our culture. You see it out there today where people think work is bad. And if I only didn't have to work, then my life would be good.

Now, let me ask you, where do you see that? How does that show itself in our culture, in our country, in the places where we live? Working for the weekend.

Yeah, working for the weekend. So I'm working these five days, so Saturday and Sunday I can enjoy myself. Billy? The lottery.

[20:40] The lottery. Yeah, the lottery. If I could just win the lottery, then my life would be set. I'd be happy. What else?

Can you think of anything else? Retirement. What do you mean by that? That you work for retirement. Yeah. So that you don't have to work.

Right. Retirement in the sense of, now I'm just going to sit around all day and watch TV or collect seashells or not do anything productive. That kind of retirement. That's all part of that pagan worldview.

That work is a necessary evil. Yeah, we have to do it, but it's bad. Now, the Bible has a very different message. And I think this is so, it's good for us to get a hold of this because it changes the way you think and you feel about work.

Work has always been a part of God's design for man. But it was perfect design. It was part of the garden experience. It was as much as part of our basic humanity.

[21:50] We need work like we need food. And it's part of our humanity in the sense of we need rest and friendship. We need prayer.

We need worship. We appreciate beauty. Everything that what it means to be a human. Work is part of that. Tim Keller says, work is not simply medicine, but food for our souls.

See, medicine is something that you take just because you need to. But food is something you need, you enjoy, it's good for you all on its own.

So work is not simply medicine. It's food for our souls. And if you've been unemployed for any amount of time, for a long time, you know how hard it is. People cut off from work discover how hard it is to thrive without it.

It's actually one of the few things that we can take in significant doses without harm. Work is one of the few things that we can take in great doses, and it doesn't actually hurt us.

[23:04] According to God, what is the correct dosage for work? It's not work one day, rest six. It's not work one day, rest one day.

It's work six days, and then rest on the seventh. Leisure, pleasure, rest, they are great goods. They're wonderful.

They're gifts from God. But we can have too much of them. God made us to work, and God made us to work a lot. He made us to work a lot.

And that's why the lottery is such a terrible joke and such a big mistake. Because we don't just need money to survive. We do need work.

We need something productive to do, to grow, to thrive. Work is how you discover your talents. Work is how you discover who we are.

[24:03] It's how we grow in our abilities and our skills. It's how we flourish. It's how we worship God. Listen to what Dorothy Sayers says. She's a Christian author and a thinker.

What is the Christian understanding of work? It is that work is not primarily a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do.

It is, or it should be, the full expression of the worker's faculties, the medium in which he offers himself to God.

All that is to say that work is good. It's good for us. We need it, and we need a lot of it. Now, fourth, let's talk about the freedom of our work.

So we've seen the goodness of our work, now the freedom of our work. And what I mean by this is that work is the place where we experience freedom as humans.

[25:15] Are you feeling and sensing and understanding how contradictory that is to what the world is telling us? Work is the place of our freedom.

So modern people like to think about freedom as a complete absence of constraint. So no one telling me what to do.

No one telling me how I need to do it. No one telling me to wake up. No one telling me to go to bed. No one telling me I have to do this or I have to do that. Nothing getting in my way from doing what I want.

In other words, freedom for them is infinite leisure. Now, is that freedom? Is that real freedom? No, that's just freedom in sinful man's imagination.

That freedom doesn't actually exist in the world. It doesn't actually exist anywhere in the world. It's unicorn freedom. It's fairy freedom. You can imagine it.

[26:18] We can put our minds around it. But it doesn't actually exist in the world. There's no such thing as freedom where there's just no constraints. Freedom never means that.

So, just for example, think of a fish. This is an easy illustration. A fish. Where does a fish get its oxygen? From the water.

Not from the air. Now, a fish is only as free. It's only free as long as it's constricted, constrained to the water. Isn't it?

That's where it experiences its freedom. But let's say I'm a fish freedom fighter. I look at the fish and I see they are shackled to the water.

They're in chains to the rivers. And I look at their poor condition. And I look and I say they can't walk on land. They've never felt the breezes on their skin.

[27:17] They've never seen trees. They've never walked on land. And so I say I will set them free. Viva la revolucion. And I grab my net. And I throw the fish onto the land.

And I say, yes, experience. The wind blows on your skin. And they flop around. And then it dies. And there goes my revolution.

But he didn't make food like that. He made food good to taste, beautiful to look at. Food is good for our bodies, it's good for our hearts as well.

[33:30] So, God didn't just make things useful, he made them wonderful, he made them to enjoy. And so, work has its place, efficiency, and speed.

All those things, production, all those things have their place, but it cannot become our God. Rest gives us a chance then to say, work, you are not my God.

Rest gives us a chance to say, I am going to enjoy and depend and trust in God as my God. I'm not going to trust work to provide for me, I'm going to trust God to be the ultimate provider for me.

And so, I don't have to bow down to efficiency, to production. I don't have to bow down to work, and I don't have to bow down to money. No, God is my God.

I depend upon him and I will worship him. And rest gives me a chance and an opportunity to do that. So, work and rest.

[34:33] They're both part of God's good design for work. So, we saw five things today. In the beginning, there was work. We saw how God works.

We saw the goodness of work. We saw the freedom of work. And lastly, we saw the limits of work. Work cannot become our God. God. And we've seen that he's not only made things useful but enjoyable.

Well, today is a day of rest. It's a day for us to enjoy God, to thank him, to enjoy what he's given us. And so, let's do that as we worship together. We're dismissed.

Thank you. Thank you.