

The Cultivation of Work

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[0:00] Well, in the Sunday School, we've begun a series, or we're in the middle of a series. As we go through the book, Every Good Endeavor, Connecting Your Work to God's Work by Tim Keller.

So far, we've seen the dignity of our work, and we've seen the design of our work. Last week, we saw that our work is dignified because it is one of the main ways that we live out the image of God. Remember, the image of God carries with it the idea that we are living representatives of God's kingdom. And so, we are created in some ways like God because we are called to rule and subdue the earth for God. And so, our status as image bearers, as royal sons, equips us to do the work that God has called humanity to. And of course, we haven't yet got to the point where we look at how sin has affected these realities, his design and our dignity. Because of course, Adam fell into sin. And with Adam, together, all of the human race fell into sin. And so, the image of God became twisted. And instead of representing his kingdom, we go about the business of building our own little kingdoms instead of his big kingdom. And so, we go to work for our own personal kingdoms. But that's not how it originally was. No, our work originally carried this great dignity that we were doing this as God's royal sons. We were doing it for him and for his glory and for his fame. We were doing it alongside of him as his sons. So, this week, our lesson is entitled,

Work as Cultivation. Work as Cultivation. Now, let me ask you, what do you think of when you think of the word cultivation? What comes to mind? A hoe. So, we're doing some gardening. What else? A crock pot. Tell me about that, because I have no idea what to do with that one. What was the question? Well, we are in a bad way here. What do you think of when you think of the word cultivation?

You said a crock pot. You're cultivating a meal. You're fixing a meal. Ah, okay. So, you're fixing a meal. What else comes to mind? Preparation. Peced.

[2:52] Okay. Why, Scott? That's just what you do. Isn't there a farm instrument called a cultivator? Yeah.

Okay. What does a cultivator do? Prepares the ground for seed. Okay. So, cultivation. You think about farming, gardening. You think about caring. So, you're preparing. You're putting work and effort into things. So, why do you suppose, where did Keller get this idea that work is cultivation? Cultivation. Why do you think he called this chapter that? Where do you think we're going in this lesson? Cultivation is taking out what you don't want and leaving what you do want.

So, that is the Christian life is cultivating, taking out the things that we don't want, the flesh, those things that are ungodly, but developing the godly character.

Okay. How does that relate to work? Our work? Because I think there's an analogy there. Yes, Kevin?

[4:04] In regards to preparation before you go to work, I mean, we prepare to be image bearers before we go to work. So, you prepare to go to work and bear the image of God.

Okay. With the right mindset. I think you're right. Well, I think back to the garden. In the beginning, the Lord told Adam to work the sword. That's what you do. You cultivate. You mulch up the ground. You plant the seed.

Right. So, the very first job that humans had was to take care of a garden. And so, there was cultivation in the agricultural sense right from the very beginning.

But that was only a picture, the beginning of what all of humanity is called to do, which is to cultivate the earth, cultivate the resources, cultivate and make something where previously it was wild or it needed developed, its potential need brought out.

And so, turn with me in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 1 verse 28. This is, we've read this before. But again, we need to start at the beginning as we think about what our work was originally meant

to be.

[5:27] And here we have God's command to humanity. Genesis 1 verse 28. God blessed them.

That's man and woman. And he said to them, Be fruitful and increase in number. 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.

So, here he says, fill and subdue the earth. Now, look over at Genesis chapter 2 in verse 15. So, here we have sort of the ongoing story.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, But you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

For when you eat of it, you will surely die. The Lord God said, It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him. Now, the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air.

[6:36] And he brought them to the man to see what he would name them. And whatever the man called each living creature, That was its name. And so the man gave names to all the livestock.

The birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam, This naming had a purpose. But for Adam, No suitable helper was found.

And so the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. And while he was sleeping, He took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man.

And he brought her to the man. So God tells man to work and take care of the garden. And the first order of business was organizing and naming the animals.

And out of that exercise, Adam realized that none of these animals were suitable to help me.

[7:38] And so together, So God made him fall into a deep sleep. He made a woman. And together, Side by side, They were going to work together to fill, To subdue, To work, And to tend the place, The garden, Where God put them.

So right from the very beginning, We have farming, We have animals, We have man is working and organizing, Cultivating and tending, Taking care of things. And so that's why work is cultivation.

See, Our work looks very different from that original work for the most part. And yet, It's still all a part of that family of cultivation. It all fits under that category of cultivation.

So today I have three points. First we're going to talk about what does it mean to fill and subdue the earth? What does it mean to fill and subdue the earth?

Now this is what the theologians call the cultural mandate. A mandate. A mandate is an order, A command. And it's a command from God to create culture.

[8:53] So it's a cultural mandate. And so we're going to see why it's called that in a few minutes. But first I want to clarify something. And I want to help us understand.

What do I mean when I say culture? We're to create a culture. Create cultures. Well, it sounds kind of highfalutin. It sounds like, you know, we're going to make fine art or something.

But that's not exactly what creating culture is all about. Although it includes that. By culture, what I mean is, it's the whole way of living.

It's our whole, how we organize things. The materials that you use. How you use them. How you relate to people. How you relate to people who are over you.

How do you relate to people who are under you? How do you speak to others? How do you create?

What do you create? How do you use the things that you've created? How do you use your time?

How do you use your space?

[9:52] How do you use your resources? Whatever they might be. That's what I mean by culture. It's a big term. It includes all of human life.

How we organize and how we live and how we do life. Now, so this is what they're calling the cultural mandate.

So God tells us to fill the earth. Now, that's different than what he told the animals. He said, let them multiply.

Let them. So let the waters team with living creatures. Let the birds increase on the land. Let them is a passive term. Let it happen. But fill the earth is active.

He's giving man a job to do. And so that's why this is called a cultural mandate. Because this filling of the earth isn't just the natural process of reproduction.

[10:55] He has something different in mind than just what the animals do. He isn't just talking about having babies. Filling the earth means something different to humans than it does to animals or to plants or to fish or to birds.

Because when humans create, when humans fill the earth, it means civilization. It means culture. It doesn't mean just procreation. And so this goes back to how God made us. We're the image bearers of God. And so when we fill the earth, we don't just make babies.

We bring a kingdom to a place. We were meant to bring God's kingdom to a place. We make a society. See, God could have just said the word and filled the earth with lots and lots of people and put them in lots and lots of cities and make a whole society all at once.

But that's not how he did it. He gives us the job to develop and build the society. Now, I think one helpful lesson that just comes out of that is that that means single people.

[12:14] Single people without children can keep this command to fill and subdue the earth. Because God isn't just talking about having babies and making families.

He's talking about the various ways that we live as image bearers of God. He's talking about all the different ways that we create culture, that we create civilizations, that we create cities.

So a single person is not living a half human life. It's not like they're not fulfilling God's command to fill and subdue.

Because God's command to humans to fill and subdue the earth never merely meant having babies. But of course, that was part of the meaning.

And it was certainly a necessary part of it. But that's not all that it meant. So when God says fill and subdue the earth, he means create culture. Now, you can see that that that was God's intention.

[13:17] Although we failed at it, you can see that that was God's intention. Because when we fast forward the tape and we go all the way to the end. Jesus, the second Adam, who does what the first Adam failed to do, who does what humanity failed to do, he does.

When salvation is complete, what is Jesus built? What comes out of heaven? It's a city. It's a whole culture, a whole kingdom created for the glory of God.

And so, what Jesus, the second Adam, is doing, what is Jesus, the second Adam, doing now?

By the preaching of God's word. By the ministry and the work of the church. Well, he's creating a society, a culture that is to the glory of God.

It's the manifestation of God's kingdom on this earth. So, we can see, what was God's intention?

[14:24] Well, Adam failed at it, but Jesus doesn't fail at it. And when Jesus completes salvation, the whole new heavens and the new earth, Revelation paints it as a city where God is in the center of it.

And God's glory fills it. Well, so what does God want us to do? What do we mean by fill and subdue the earth? We mean create culture, create civilization.

This is more than having families, even though, obviously, that's a necessary part of it. So, that brings us to our second point. How do we create culture?

How are we meant to cultivate? If we're called to cultivate, called to create culture, that begs the question of how we should do it.

So, here I'm talking about, where's our guidelines? Where's our instructions? What's the moral parameters, the moral outline of what that, what are we supposed to be doing?

[15:25] How are we supposed to be doing that culture, making that culture? Well, first, negatively, what it's not meant to be, what it's not, what it shouldn't be like.

Some people have complained that this command to subdue the earth gives people the right to exploit, to abuse nature.

And, to be honest, I think some Christians have, thinks that, thinks that gives them that right. But, that's not what he's talking about. This command comes before nature was in decay.

Nature was in bondage to sin. At this point, there's still harmony in nature. And so, there's no violent intent to subduing and to ruling.

We weren't at war with nature. And, in some ways, we might be at war with nature now because of the curse. And so, this idea isn't just pave it down, get rid of it, make a parking lot, squash it.

[16:33] Instead, we rule and we subdue as the image bearers of God. So, we do it as stewards. So, what is the job of a steward?

What do they do? Take care of someone else's stuff. Take care of someone else's property. Take care of someone else's property. So, remember, Joseph was a steward in Potiphar's house.

He didn't own anything. He just merely took care of it. God owns this world. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.

God's the king. And, we are merely called to extend his kingdom. And, he's put the created world under our care to cultivate it.

The world's resources are ours to use, but not to abuse. And, we can't abuse them because they're not ours. They're not ours to do just whatever we want and use them selfishly.

[17 : 33] And, so, as we create culture, if it's going to be biblical, it can't be abusive. It can't be selfish, but loving and gracious.

So, that's the negative side. What it can't be. Now, positively, how should we create culture? Well, if it's not abusive, this word certainly is a strong one.

To subdue the earth is a strong word. It means real assertion of will. The real assertion of your will. It's to tame, so to speak. And, so, when we create cultures in our families, in our church, in our country, in our city, in our neighborhoods, whatever that culture, however big that is, we assert our will on the stuff of nature.

We assert our will on what is before us. And, we do that in order to bring out its potential. So, if you think about it, this is imitating God.

[18 : 43] It's what God did. Remember when God first made the world? Genesis 1.1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

What was the condition of the heavens and the earth when God first created it? Roger? It was chaos. You put order into it. It was formless and void.

So, that's two things. One, there was no form. So, it was chaotic. And, it was void. It was empty. And, so, throughout the days of creation, God addresses these conditions of being formless and being empty.

He asserts his will through his word on creation. So, it's unshaped. It's undifferentiated. And, then, he distinguishes.

Day, night, seas, land, so forth. He elaborates. He brings light from darkness. He makes man and woman.

[19 : 46] Things that are different and yet good, each in their own way. So, how do we create the culture that, how do we cultivate?

Well, we do it in imitation of God. God lovingly, kindly, thoughtfully, with wisdom and thought and power, asserted his will on the material that was before him.

And, so, we aren't called to be passive. We aren't called to be park rangers. You know, a park ranger is just someone who sits and observes.

But, on the other hand, we're not called to make parking lots everywhere. We're gardeners. We dig it up. We plant seeds.

We make it grow. We make flowers blossom. We make houses. And, we make cars. And, we make businesses. And, we build services. And, the intention was always that we would do all of those things for the glory of God.

[20 : 52] To bring his kingdom to this earth and for man's good. That all those things together would enhance creation. So, farming, it does it with dirt and seeds and water.

Music, making of music, does that with sounds. It organizes and shapes sounds and makes it into something beautiful. When you take fabric and you cut it and you sew it and you make it into a dress.

You take it from an unshaped condition and you make it into something useful and good. When we program computers. When we take unformed human minds and teach them.

That's part of cultivating. When we make goods and we sell them. When we drive a garbage truck.

When we sweep a broom. We're taking and we're organizing and we're bringing out the potential.

We're subduing and filling the earth. And, that's what cultivating is. That's what we mean by work is cultivation.

[22 : 05] It's not just punching the time clock. It's not just going to work. It's just not going through the routine. It's taking and imitating God.

It's making something where there was some unformed potential before. Keller tells the story of a man in his congregation named James Tuffington.

And, James is an entrepreneur. And, after making several businesses. After creating several other businesses. For some reason he was working in Armenia. Which is over in Asia.

And, when he was there. He was there for a while. And, he grew more and more frustrated. At the poverty. At the waste in the country.

So, huge areas of Armenia. They were growing all this fruit. All this fruit. And, some of that fruit made it to the market. But, large amounts were lost because of poor shipping.

[23:13] Because, a lack of storage. And, so it was producing all of this fruit. And, yet so little of it was actually coming in for the good of the people there.

And, so do we need UPS? Yeah. Do we need warehouses? Yes. So, do we need people to run those warehouses? And, do those sort of ordinary jobs?

Yes. Well, so he saw this loss. And, this waste. Fruit rotting. And, he decided that he's going to start a fruit preserve business.

Making jams. So, you can Google Harvest Song. And, you can order some of his jams that he took from Armenia. So, what did he do?

What did James do? He saw a realm. He saw a place where there was potential. But, it needed organization. It needed someone to assert their will on it.

[24:12] And, make it something useful and good. Where, right now, it just had that potential. And, so he put it to work. And, he was a gardener. He cultivated what was good, but what was left undone.

And, that's what God does. That's what God did. He asserted his will on creation wisely. With love and with care and with thought.

And, that's how we are called to create culture. Now, that brings us to our third point.

And, this is where I want to bring all, sort of all this stuff that was up here. Big picture stuff. And, I want to bring it down to where we live. And, our third point is God's purpose for you, individually.

So, we've seen what it means to fill and subdue the earth. It means to create culture. And, we saw how we do it. We do it by graciously, kindly, asserting our wills as we imitate God.

[25:15] And, so let's bring this home. What does this mean for you? Think about it this way. God is an investment maker. Now, in our culture, investment makers have a bad rap.

But, Jesus, that's exactly what Jesus said God is like. He gives certain amounts of talents to people, doesn't he? And, he expects work to get done.

So, he's given talents to each of you. He's given you resources. He's given you time. He's given you people. He's given you financial resources, physical resources, human resources.

He's given you these skills. And, now he has said, work for me. Create a culture that's for my glory. So, what does God want us to do?

He wants us to create those cultures that honor him. And, that's so much more than numbers on a P&L; statement. Just making money.

[26:17] That's, moms, that's more than just getting your checklist done every day. It's so much more than earning a paycheck. It's so much more than even just witnessing on a job.

Which, of course, all those things are good things. He wants you to create a culture that honors him. That reflects his beauty. His goodness.

His wisdom. His generosity. His justice. His righteousness. His righteousness. So, moms. You're in different stages of your lives.

And, God has made each of you differently. He's invested in you differently. He's made some of you extroverts. And, so, you just can't get enough of your children.

And, you're so excited about them all of the time. Some of you, he's made introverts. And, there's times when you need to be away from your children. And, that's good in its own way, too.

[27:16] He's given some of you quick minds. And, quick tongues. You always have the right words that need to be said. Some of you, he's given quick hands and gentle hearts.

You might not always know what exactly you need to say. But, you can physically love them. And, he's given some of you more financial resources. And, some of you less.

However, he's invested in you. He wants you to take those skills. Those resources. Those opportunities. And, he wants you to create in your home.

A culture. That honors him. So, he put you into that garden. And, he called you to cultivate that garden. And, so that, he doesn't want you to be passive.

He doesn't want you just to stand back and let life happen in your family. Instead, he wants you to create a culture where children can grow and thrive in every way.

[28:18] Physically. Emotionally. Emotionally. Spiritually. He wants you to take all that untapped potential that resides in your children.

And, he wants you to bring it out and make it something beautiful and productive. So, there's your garden. So, don't just say, I have my checklist and I'm getting through things and I'm doing it. So, that sort of thing. Make it. He wants you to create that beautiful culture for him. Exert yourself. Read Proverbs 31. That woman works hard. She is exerting and asserting herself in the world around her for her family.

And, so the result is her family rises and praises her. So, if you own a, that's moms. If you own a business or you have a manager. So, you're the manager of some part of a company.

[29:19] Some part of a business. What does God want you to do? He wants you to create a business culture. A work culture that honors him. That reflects his productivity.

His beauty. His goodness. All the things that we talked about. God cares for his servants. He cares for those who are under him. And, your management should reflect that.

You should value your employees not just as workers. Not as just units of hours of work. But, as people. And, you should see their work as having more meaning than just numbers and efficiency. Because, that work is a part of who they are. That, and it's not something you can just quantify. And, that means you can't just treat those people who are under you as machines.

They, too. Like you. Are made in the image of God. And, their work has a spiritual dimension to it. That, maybe they don't even understand.

[30:19] But, if anyone should be able to look at them. And, tell them about. That you were made for more than just getting a paycheck. It should be you. So, you want you to cultivate your business.

Your department. Into a culture. That reflects his grace. And, his love. And, his justice. All of his glory.

Now, maybe. You're on the bottom rung. Where you work. If you are the dishwasher at a restaurant. And, I don't know if any of you are.

If you're a dishwasher at a restaurant. Your sink. Your small space. Should be for God's glory. The way you work. Should serve others.

And, contribute. To a positive. To a God-glorifying culture. In your workplace. My wife. When we were engaged. So, 12 years ago.

[31:16] Or so now. She worked at Steak and Shake. And, at Steak and Shake. There was a mentally handicapped. She had a mentally handicapped. Coworker named Donald. And, Donald did the dishes.

At Steak and Shake. And, it might have seemed. That Donald was a nobody. Might have seemed that way. But, if you were to think that. You'd be dead wrong.

Donald made everyone's life. Better. At Steak and Shake. Because, he loved his job. He was happy to be there. And, he loved to sing.

While he worked. And, so he filled. The Steak and Shake kitchen. With his songs. And, he did his job. With care. And, with joy.

And, that made. The people around him. Want to do their jobs better. So, waitresses.

[32:14] Were better waitresses. Because, Donald. Was there. And, managers. And, cooks. Did better. Managing and cooking. Because, Donald.

Rejoiced. In his work. So, Donald. The mentally handicapped. Dishwasher. Made Steak and Shake. A better restaurant. It made them more money.

It made them. Better workers. It made the customers. More pleased. With the service. That they received. So, even if you're on the bottom rung.

You can contribute. To a culture. That it blesses people. And, that honors God. And, so no job is too small. No job is too big. No matter what job you have.

You can do it. To the glory of God. As you graciously. As you righteously. Assert your will. On what's before you. As you create a culture. That reflects.

[33:13] His goodness. Well. We're out of time. We are dismissed.