

**Let's pray.**

If you have just joined us today, we are in our 6th week of a fall study on "Life with God for the World" – exploring what it means for the gospel to have its way in our hearts, our **life as a community** and our **life in the world** – all for the sake of the world...

Six weeks ago, we started this series by reflecting together on the story of Israel entering exile in Babylon, hearing God instruction and invitation (in Jer 29) to:

*"Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which you I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."*

If you were with us on that Sunday – you might remember the question we pondered as a frame to this study.

*"Why are we **HERE?**  
Why are you **HERE?**"*

And the answer we considered (drawn from Jeremiah 29 and elsewhere) is that **we are HERE because of the gospel**. We are here because of God's heart **for the world** – not just for our souls – and **God's INTENTION** for the gospel to not just embrace **US** – but to invade and pervade the whole of our lives (our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength) – that ultimately, as we work and live in

THIS PLACE, the gospel would be made **known HERE – in THIS PLACE -  
through us** – FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD!!!!

*through you and me, and our life together in Christ.*

*But, as we named right at the start of this study: **It doesn't just happen.***

No, it requires the gospel having its way in EVERY PART OF US... Being captured by God's vision and heart to reconcile **ALL THINGS** to Himself in Christ... Not just our Sunday worship and our devotional practices – but every part of our lives. *our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength...*

And this morning, we need to talk about one very significant and undeniable part of our everyday lives – **which is: our WORK.**

Which is vital for us to talk about – in relation to the gospel and a living faith – because WE SPEND SO MUCH OF OUR LIVES AT WORK. Don't we?

A number of years ago I came across a stunning stat (and it's an old stat, but I've looked and there are similar in our day). The study showed that the average working Canadian spends between **88,000-100,000 hours on the job** over the course of their working years. Almost (or more than) **40%** of our waking hours are spent at work. **More than a third of our lives.**

And recent studies show this increasing, and, for most people, the pandemic only adding to this.

So, whatever study you are looking at – the conclusion is the same: we spend a HUGE percentage of our lives at work.

A huge portion that some of us have never really considered or embraced as INTEGRAL to our pursuit of Christ – to our LIFE WITH GOD.

You know, you have your life with God, and then, over here, you have your work. ***But it's a false dichotomy.*** At least, for those who follow Christ.

And I love how this is evident in the New Testament... How the Apostle Paul names this in so many of his letters – though we might not always notice it.

In all of his letters, he writes about the gospel and the invitation to live our lives in Christ, or to walk in the Spirit. But never is this envisioned as simply a Sunday morning or churchy matter. It's an everyday thing – something to be worked out in our ordinary lives – and *among other things*, he always ends up talking about how this plays out in ***our WORK life*** - both in the relationships involved in our work, and in the very doing of our work.

To quote Amy L. Sherman, a Christian scholar who's written and taught extensively on the theology of work. She says,

***"One of the primary ways that we live missionally in the city is through the stewardship of our vocations."***

*Our everyday work – done for the glory of God + the benefit of others.*

To which our hearts SHOULD say: AMEN. Thank GOD!

It's good to know that our work matters to God – because **IF IT DOESN'T**  
– *then so much of our lives **doesn't** matter to God.*

But – thank God – it does... They do.

Because, from the opening page of the Bible, we are invited to discover and embrace the grace that **ALL OF LIFE** – every aspect of our lives – **matters to God...** Including *our work*.

Whatever your work is. (Do you hear that? Do you know that? Feel that?)

Your Work Matters to God... **WHATEVER YOUR WORK IS.**

And I know that most of us know this (this is **so** basic), but I think some of you need to hear this again today – and maybe specifically **from me** – a pastor – whose work or calling has **often** been considered or referred to in Christian circles as a **higher calling**, work that **truly matters** (in the economy of God) – in contrast to other work or callings...

But I need to say that **there is no higher calling than simply doing what God has given you to do** – for His glory.

**Whatever you do.**

That's what Apostle Paul says in **Colossians 3:17**,

**"Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."**

**Whatever you do.**

And in case the Christians in Colossae missed it, 6 verses later (Col 3:23-24), Paul returns to this same theme – declaring,

*"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."*

**Whatever** you do.

Which sadly, is **NOT** the message we've often learned in the church. Is it?

We've often been told or thought, or found ourselves implying that **certain work** REALLY MATTERS to God, and His kingdom, and eternity.

And then there's **the rest of us** who build things, fix things, make signs, manage systems, restock shelves, clean up after others, coach sports, record music, or do payroll.

Case in point: I have a small collection of my grandfather's old books –

and recently I pulled a biography off my shelf – that told the life story of an incredible woman of faith. It was humble and inspiring. But I couldn't help flinch when, on the last page of the book, in the epilogue, the biographer writes that (quote)

*"three of her nine children survived, and each are **in the service of the Lord**. One becoming a pastor, one a missionary, and the other, a Bank Manager, **though widely known for his evangelistic activities.**"*

The implication being that it was **ONLY** his involvement in "*evangelistic activities*" that caused this latter son to be included in this list – as one who works *in the service of the Lord...*

Not that we use the language much these days, but some who've grown up in the church will be familiar with the term: "**THE LORD'S WORK**". As a way of distinguishing what kind of work is truly valuable to the kingdom – i.e. "*the Lord's Work*" – and what kind of work isn't...

It's just **work**. (He was *just a Bank Manager*.)

Which is surprising – because this is not something we've learned from reading our Bibles...

Have you ever stopped to consider the wide range of **jobs** – or **work** – that God – the LORD – has done and does?

**I.e., What kind of work is really *the Lord's work*?**

And I need to tip my hat to Paul Stevens (one of my professors at Regent College) for helping me see this years ago...

In just the opening chapter of the Bible – Genesis 1 – we discover God at work in **ALL** sorts of ways:

**Creating**. *Crafting. Forming. Filling. Shaping. (beautiful things, practical things, nourishing things – notably, all good things).*

**Bringing order** *(out of chaos). Providing. Planting. Setting up the Lights. Blessing. Speaking. Communicating.*

**Instructing.** Distinguishing. Delegating + Empowering. Celebrating.  
Giving Rest.

And that's just some of what we see God doing in Genesis 1. As we keep reading, we see God at work:

**Sustaining things.** Organizing things. Imagining. Story-telling. Parenting.  
Bringing things to completion. Disciplining. Advising. Making wine. Designing  
Gardens.

**Warning.** Setting Boundaries for the common good. Intervening.  
Purging. Assessing. Forecasting outcomes. Destroying. Helping. Healing.  
Feeding. Protecting.

**Renewing.** Nurturing. Comforting. Seeking Justice. Counseling.

**Leading.** Encouraging. Guiding. Directing. Unifying. Search and  
Rescue. Deploying people.

**Mediating.** Investigating. Mending. Listening. Judging.

And although we don't read a lot about it, it's widely understood that Jesus, the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Eternal Trinity, the Living God Incarnate, spent at least 15 years of his life (maybe more) **working with wood** – alongside his father – building and repairing things – as a **carpenter**.

Tell me friends – what qualifies as *the LORD's Work*?

It would be fascinating to go around the room and ask one another where our respective work or job shows up on this list... to name and celebrate **HOW EACH OF OUR WORK IS SOMEHOW AN EXTENSION OF THE LORD'S WORK!**

Because it is. All of it. *Whatever your work is.*

I love how Timothy Keller describes (what he calls) "the glory of **gardening** – taking raw material and rearranging it for the flourishing of creation/humanity."

That's what God is doing in creation – and it's what God calls Adam (and Eve) to do in the Garden...

## So WHY is this important for us to understand?

Well, it's important for a number of reasons.

### 1. Because it simply tells us that **God works.**

Which means that **WORK** is not an **unspiritual** or **ungodly** activity – that we should view as a **DISTRACTION** from life with God, or the pursuit of God.

Just the opposite, it is an integral part to a life with God. It is one of the primary contexts where we live out our trust in God, our allegiance to Him, and our worship of Him.

**OR** where these are shown to be lacking or non-existent.

**In the beginning, God worked. And He's still at work.** Which means **WORK can be a godly endeavor** – *even if your work is gardening* (which, let it be said, is not normally considered "a helping-profession").

**And** not only that, but **(2) OUR GOD WHO WORKS has CREATED US TO WORK – to work for** Him and with Him – in ways that honor His values, and dreams, and ways...

From the Christian or biblical perspective, WORK is **NOT a curse or a part of the curse**. Though sometimes we think this way. That work is something we should try to get free from. **But it's not**. Not according to the Bible.

Work and our call to work is not something that shows up after the Fall – but right *in the beginning*.

Genesis 1:26f,

*"Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the air..."*

And then a couple of verses later – in **Gen 1:28**, we're told,

*"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 creature that moves on the ground.'"*

And in **2:15** we read explicitly that

*"The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden..." (Why?) "to work it and take care of it."*

Right there, we are told **explicitly** that Adam was commanded by God to **WORK** as a **GARDENER** – *"to work it and take care of it."*

And **NOT** as a PUNISHMENT or a CURSE, but as a **holy privilege** – participating with God in God's ongoing care for creation...

All that to say – **your work matters to God.**

*Whatever you do.*

Which makes me want to request a re-write of the epilogue of that old memoir I read recently – The Story of A Life in the Love of God (by Dr. W. Graham Scroggie). In a way, it simply reflects the common perspective of many in the church at the time, but **it's surprising** when you realize that **so many** of the stories of **GOD'S WORK** in this very memoir – in the life of this woman and her family – were not limited to explicitly "spiritual" events (witnessing, bible study, conversion, prayer, etc), but often were bound up in God's provision IN VERY PRACTICAL WAYS for this woman and her struggling family. God's provision of furniture. God's provision of needed housing, of good theological books, of wise medical help, or of an understanding bank manager.

Which tells us that each of these people (*the furniture maker and retailer, the landlord, the book publisher and printer and writer, the medical professional, and the bank manager*) – doing **their ordinary work** – each of them were truly an answer to prayer and a means of **the LORD'S Work** – God's loving care and provision for this woman and her family – on a regular basis...

And so, I'd like to RAISE A GLASS to the late Frederick John Scroggie,  
who didn't just serve the Lord *afterhours*, but who *served the Lord AS A BANK  
MANAGER* in Walham Green, London – about a hundred years ago!

Thank God for Christians who manage banks well. And who make good  
furniture. And are good landlords. For Christians doctors who bring their best  
to their patients. And Christian publishers and editors and print makers who  
make available good books.

*for the glory of God and the good of their neighbors.*

As Paul writes, "**WHATEVER YOU DO**".

And not merely on your breaks, or afterhours – but in the very work of  
your work.

I've always appreciated Dorothy Sayers wise comment here. She writes,

"The church's approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to  
exhorting him not to be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours and to  
come to church on Sundays. What the church should be telling him is this:  
that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he  
should **make good tables.**"

As Timothy Keller, in his wonderful book, Every Good Endeavor, simply  
states, "**All jobs – not merely so-called helping professions – are fundamentally  
ways of loving your neighbor.**"

**"Whatever you do..."**

Think about this (and I'm quoting Gene Veith here),

"When I go into a restaurant, the waitress who brings me my meal, the cook in the back who prepared it, the delivery men, the wholesalers, the workers in the food-processing factories, the butchers, the farmers, the ranchers, and everyone else in the economic food chain are all being used by God to 'give me this day my daily bread.'

And if we wanted, we could take this exercise farther – to include the people who design and manufacture the farming equipment, and the people who design and build and maintain the warehouses that store the grain, and the government workers who serve in the Ministry of Agriculture, and the seed industry, and land surveyors, and on and on and on.

It is no surprise that the ancient Jewish thinker, Ben Sirah, 200 years before Jesus, in the Apocryphal book **Ecclesiasticus**, wrote of the vital work of all trades people – "They keep stable the fabric of the world, and their prayer is in the practice of their trade." (Ecclesiasticus 38:25-32, 34).

Our God works.

And he has created us to work.

And by our work, to participate in **His** care of creation and one another – for His glory...

And because of this – (third) **GOD MATTERS to your work.**

Whatever your work is.

And maybe this is the *surprising* significance of **God's BLESSING** of Adam and Eve in Gen 1:28.

In Hebrew, the word **BLESS** doesn't simply mean to encourage or affirm someone, or to wish someone well after a sneeze, but to **EMPOWER someone or something to be ABLE to accomplish WHATEVER it is that God has made or commanding us to do.**

And in the case of Genesis 1-2, God's blessed Adam and Eve for what purpose? God blessed them for the sake of **PARENTING + GARDENING.** [Note that.] God blessed them so that they would bear and raise children + take care of their bit of the garden.

*Which might not seem like a big deal to us* – but it strikes me as dramatically **different** than what kind of work we often think deserves and require God's blessing and empowerment.

Here and there, I'll run into one of you during the week, and you'll ask me if I'm preaching this Sunday – and you'll say, "**Alright, I'll be praying for you.**"

Which I'm so thankful for. Keep at it. I need it. For all our sake...

But here's the vital insight of Genesis 1 and 2 and Paul's "*whatever you do*". It's that **every kind** of work deserves and requires God's blessing... God's empowering... **God's Work...**

Not just preaching. But running Parkside Motors. And raising humans.  
And working as a community health nurse. And teaching middle school  
students, or designing apartment buildings.

According to Genesis 1, Adam and Eve NEEDED the blessing of God to  
do the work God had given *them* to do – which for them meant parenting +  
gardening – for the blessing of all.

And so here's my point: not only does **YOUR WORK MATTER** to God  
(*whatever your work*) – but **GOD MATTERS** to *your work*.

*Whatever it is.*

*So that **your work** might truly be a participation in what God is doing on  
earth – for His glory and for the good of all... (Whatever you do...)*

Which makes me think of Kenzie's dad – Bruce Watson – who passed  
away two Fridays ago and who's life some of us gathered to honor this past  
Tuesday morning. Honestly, for all the grief bound up in Bruce's untimely  
death, the memorial was, among other things, a beautiful testimony to the grace  
of "holy work".

Not that Bruce worked in a field we'd normally regard as "holy". He was  
an **accountant** – a CPA – who became a CFO (chief financial officer). An  
accountant and CFO who sought to honor God in and with his daily work – for

the benefit of all his clients. And God was glorified in him – in his work – not just through who he was around the proverbial water-cooler (though that too), but in the character and quality of his work. ***Work done for the glory of God and the good of the world.***

I think I can say with confidence that Bruce's entrance into glory involved hearing his Lord say,

*"Well done. Good and faithful servant.  
You honored me in the work I gave you..."*

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SO, what about us and the work God has given us in this season? Where is God speaking to you in all this today?

*"Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."* (Colossians 3:17)

*"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."* (Colossians 3:23-24)

**TWO QUESTIONS** to talk through with God in the coming days:

- **What raw material** has God placed in **your care** – for you to work with for the flourishing of creation or humanity – or both?
- **How can you do your work** in such a way that enables creation or other people to flourish – physically, relationally, socially, psychologically, emotionally, spiritually?