

Why the Frustration in Work?

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening. Great to be with you again at Brunsfield. Thank you so much for your kind invitation. We're going to be looking at Genesis chapter 3 tonight in the main.

So if you've got a Bible handy, it would be great to have it open at Genesis chapter 3. Let me just mention one or two FIEC things. You'd expect me to do that.

I'm sure the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches, I work full-time for them in Scotland and the north of England. I think I've had opportunity to mention one or two things about them on previous visits.

But the work is going ahead. It's great that the network of churches is growing. A couple of churches recently just voted to affiliate to FIEC. And it's great just to see that work growing, but not just for the sake of growth, because of the opportunities it gives us for gospel partnership and work. And among the particular things we've been involved in recently are the Pathways Ministry. This may have been brought to your attention already, but we've been meeting with church leaders around Scotland to share with them something of the vision of Pathways, which is to help churches create a training culture within the local congregation to equip men and women for gospel service.

[1 : 17] And then in particular, we have a day conference coming up in January this year. It's going to be in Perth at the Tayside Christian Fellowship Church. And that's going to be for anybody who is thinking about vocational Christian ministry, whether part-time or full-time.

So perhaps you're thinking, perhaps God is calling me to serve him in some kind of set-aside way, in some capacity. It could be as an evangelist, as a youth worker, as a pastor, as a women's worker, whatever that is.

Then this could be a day that would be really helpful for you when experienced church leaders will help you think through some of the issues that you need to be considering as you weigh up that sense of call.

So I've got some leaflets. I think Graham already had some of these, but I draw that to your attention. The course that we're doing in independent church ministry is continuing at ETS this year. We've run that for two previous years. Tim Foster, one of your folks here, one of the graduates. That's a rather grand way of putting it, but he did the course and got his certificate in independent church ministry.

[2 : 23] And we're continuing to run that at ETS as a way that we can help equip and support future church leaders in independent churches of all types. And then finally, it's great to be involved in mission.

FIC in Scotland is currently linked with five church plants in various areas around the country, giving them practical support from Orkney down to the central belt.

So it's really encouraging to see that church planting going on, to see new fellowships starting and to be able to partner with them and to help them as they find their feet and get started.

And we had a mission forum day in March at Charlotte Chapel in Edinburgh where we brought church leaders from across Scotland and beyond together. And one of the projects that has come out of that is a potential new church plant in Aviemore next year.

And we are bringing together a team and support and various components that can make that happen. So pray for that. Aviemore, surprise me, is an area, a town with very little gospel witness in it.

[3 : 30] Almost nothing, not quite nothing, there never is nothing in God's mercy, but actually a town that really needs a fresh, outward-looking, evangelistically-minded gospel church.

It's a growing town, one and a half thousand new homes. Planning permission has been granted for those in the coming years. So really appreciate your prayers that that vision comes to fruition.

So that's just a little taster of some of the things that are going on in Scotland at the moment that FIC is connected with. As we come to Scripture tonight, let me just give a little apology.

I wrote down in my diary way back when I think Graeme contacted me, Genesis 3 and 4, the impact of the fall. And we're looking a bit narrower tonight, obviously from your series on the particular aspect of work.

So tonight's going to be a bit broader. We'll try and pick up on the work element of that as we go. But if it feels slightly broader, then that's all my fault for not paying attention enough at the time.

[4 : 39] But it's all God's Word, and I'm sure it will be profitable to us by the Spirit. Let me just pray as we read God's Word, as we come to consider it in more detail.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your Word. We thank you that it is true. We thank you that it is living. We thank you that it is relevant to us today.

We thank you that it speaks into our lives, that it guides us, that it is a light in a dark world. And so, Father, we do pray that as we come to it now, that you would give us ears to hear your voice, to understand the truth that you have laid down in Scripture, and to be better equipped to serve and love the Lord Jesus Christ.

Father, grant that prayer we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. So Genesis then, we're going to just pick up a couple of verses in chapter 2, by way of background.

So chapter 2 and verse 15. The Lord took the man, it's Adam, and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

[5 : 47] And the Lord 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 from it, you will certainly die.

Genesis chapter 3, verse 1. Now the snake was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, Eve, Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?

The woman said to the snake, We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say you must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it or you will die.

You will certainly not die, the snake said to the woman. For God knows that when you eat from it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.

She also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

[7 : 00] Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, Where are you?

He answered, I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid. And he said, Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?

The man said, The woman you put here with me, she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it. Then the Lord God said to the woman, What is this you have done? The woman said, The snake deceived me, and I ate.

So the Lord God said to the snake, Because you have done this, Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals. You will crawl in your belly, and you will eat dust all the days of your life.

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head, and you will crush his heel. To the woman he said, I will make your pains and childbearing very severe.

[8 : 04] With painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you. To Adam he said, Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, you must not eat from it.

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. And then verse 23.

So the Lord God banished him from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the garden of Eden, Chirubim, and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

Amen. And may God bless too, is the reading of his holy and inspired words. A number of years ago I remember having a conversation with an atheist, it was actually a relative of mine, and I just asked him up front, Why don't you believe in God?

[9 : 23] And the answer he gave to me was, Because if God had made the world, he would have made a better one than this. And for many of course, the state of the world as we look around is a real problem when it comes to having faith.

Where is this all-powerful, loving God when crimes are committed, when wars are started, when people are being abused? How can you expect me to believe in a God who would allow such misery?

And yet at the end of Genesis chapter 1, when God completed his work of creation, we read that it was a place of perfection, harmony, beauty, and peace.

At the apex of which was humanity. Man and woman, male and female, made in the image of God. Male and female created to know God and to live in the closest of all relationships with God.

People who were made to care and rule over the earth under God, kindly, and responsibly. So what happened?

[10 : 37] Why did the world, made by a loving God, so full of potential and hope, become the place that we know and experience and live in today?

A place which is marred by conflict, hardship, division, and suffering. It's why actually Genesis chapter 3 is perhaps the most important chapter in the Bible.

Certainly plot wise. Because if you take Genesis chapter 3 out of the Bible, nothing after it makes any sense. You see, Genesis chapter 3 explains why the world that we live and work in today is not the one that God made.

It's not that there's nothing good about the world now, but something went terribly wrong. And Genesis chapter 3 shows us that the bit that went terribly wrong was us, was you and me.

I remember being in Africa, you probably had this experience in various places, you could have it in parts of Scotland, but standing on a road and looking at a magnificent view, wonderful African sun, huge African sun, setting over some pink mountains, absolutely idyllic and breathtaking.

[11 : 56] But if you turned around and looked at the other side of the road, you saw a slum, terrible poverty, children in rags. The bit that God had made in that sense was wonderful.

The bit that humans had made was horrible. contrast between the good and the bad, of course, runs throughout our world, doesn't it?

Humans have achieved amazing things, quite staggering what human beings have been capable of, of the ingenuity and creativity of men and women, sent a rocket to the moon, invented medicines medicines that have relieved suffering and improved the quality of people's lives.

We have invented the internet, the entire information in the world in my pocket. Astonishing. And yet, of course, those very achievements, those very skills, that very ingenuity is simultaneously turned into making weapons, drugs that are addictive and ruin lives.

The facility to bring a tsunami of pornography into people's homes, even their pockets, potentially. Bill Bryson, the American author, lives in Britain now, I think.

[13 : 28] Not a Christian, but he wrote a book called A Short History of Nearly Everything a while ago. And he says this in it, he says, as far as we can tell, we are the best there is.

We may be all there is. It's an unnerving thought that we may be the living universe's supreme achievement and its worst nightmare simultaneously.

And of course, that problem runs right through our hearts. Every one of us is a strange mixture. Sometimes we can be capable of great acts of kindness, bravery, love for others.

And yet, on the other hand, in the blink of an eye, we can be selfish, cowardly, proud, using others. See this in so many ways, don't we?

The loving father, protective of his family, addicted to pornography. The loyal, considerate friends, meanly gossiping about a colleague.

[14 : 39] Somebody who gives generously to charity, but will lie about their taxes. Humanity is like, as somebody has put it, a ruined grandeur, a ruined castle.

Have you ever been to an old ruined castle and you look at it and if you squint, you can imagine what it was like when it was first built. You can imagine when the towers were complete and the ramparts were intact and just how magnificent and great and wonderful and impressive it was. But actually now, it's broken down. It's scarred, it's dirty and there's weeds sprouting out of it everywhere.

The account of humanity's fall in Genesis chapter 3 has a number of mysterious elements in it.

We're not told where the serpent, the tempter, the snake comes from.

We're not told where evil originated or why God allowed it into Eden. And yet the facts and lessons are clear regarding this world-changing encounter.

[15 : 49] That's why we read from Genesis chapter 2 verses 15 to 17. Do you notice there that God did two things when he places man in the garden?

Firstly, he gives Adam instructions about his purpose. If you like, he gives Adam instructions about his vocational responsibilities.

That he is there to work. You notice that? God took the man and put him in the garden to work it and to take care of it. Humanity's vocation is to steward and to manage and to care for and to oversee creation.

But he also gives Adam instructions, even he does that, about right and wrong, about his moral responsibility. And that is to obey God.

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 from it, you will certainly die. You see, just as man was dependent on God for his purpose in the world, what he was there for, he was to be dependent on God for his understanding of right and wrong.

[17 : 09] Now, of course, many today object to that, don't they? That second part, especially, they can be very offended and prickly by the suggestion that God or religion is somehow necessary in order for people to live morally good lives.

But the fact remains that once you remove God as your moral guide, you're ultimately making up your own rules.

And we know from experience that it won't be long before those rules start to get bent out of selfish self-interest. It's inevitable. And it is what we see.

So Adam has commanded not to eat of the tree of knowledge. Again, the tree of knowledge is a mysterious thing, but I don't think it was magical. I don't think there was some kind of Walt Disney-esque magic potion in the fruits, not Snow White here.

I think that it was there to teach humanity about the need right at the start of creation, the need to trust God and to obey God.

[18 : 18] that is, good was not to eat of it, that is, to obey God, whereas evil would be to eat of it, that is, to disobey God.

One writer puts it like this, Colin Adams, in his book *Unlocking the Bible Story*, he says, when God told Adam that he must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, it was as if he said, Adam, you need to understand that there is a terrible reality in the universe and I want to protect you from it.

It's called evil. You do not know anything about it, but it already exists. I do not want you ever to experience it, so whatever you do, trust me and do what I tell you.

So what on earth caused Adam and Eve to distrust God and to reject that very simple, that very basic, that very reasonable commandment.

Well, there's lots written on this, you'll be familiar with this, I'm sure, so I'll spend very little time, but three causes are very evident here, three causes that are always at play, then and today in our own lives, whenever we turn from God, whenever we make the same kind of decision as we do continually, if we're honest, to do our own thing, rather than God's, to prefer our own way to the one that God has shown us.

[19 : 59] So firstly, of course, we have misrepresentation, don't we? Satan's tactic, the snake, the tempter, is to create confusion about what God has said.

If the key to bringing down humanity is to get them to distrust God, then let's misrepresent what God has actually said and his motives for saying it.

Notice here in verse 2, verse 1 rather, said to the woman, did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?

He poses a question, but like a lot of questions, it's loaded question, isn't it? it's driving a certain answer? It's exaggeration.

God hasn't said you can't eat from any tree in the garden. Then he falls into the trap in verse 3, talking about how we were not to touch it.

[21 : 00] But actually, touching was not mentioned in chapter 2. It's all misrepresentation, it's all an attempt, an agenda here to present God as being draconian, unreasonable, excessive.

God is out to spoil your fun. Christianity is dull and boring, God is frankly just mean. But actually of course, God made all the good and fun stuff in the universe.

He made a world that was packed with delights, that is packed with delights. C.S. Lewis puts it, the devil never invented any pleasure.

He just misuses the ones that God created. My wife was given an ornament, a kind of figurine a number of years ago by an aunt, which passed away and it was left to her.

So it had kind of sentimental value, but I think it was probably quite a valuable ornament in its own right. and we told the kids they weren't allowed to touch it. We had three kids younger at that stage that said, don't touch this ornament, it's precious for various reasons.

[22 : 15] And they've got a room full of toys, if your kids are similar, a shed load of toys, ridiculous number of toys, the bottom three feet of their bed is soft toys and they've got all these things falling out of their cupboards that they never interested in.

But they so wanted to get their hands in that ornament and they were so indignant they weren't allowed to. craving for it. And it was ridiculous, you've got a room full of toys and you want this one thing.

It's very humorous, isn't it? Pretty strange really, but it's very human. It's very Genesis chapter 3. So Satan wants to misrepresent God. Secondly, he wants to sow seeds of doubt. Verse 4, his second tactic is just to challenge God's word head on.

You won't surely die. Don't worry, it's not going to be that big a deal. In fact, God is, God's word continues to be attacked in this way, doesn't it?

[23 : 25] God didn't really mean. A warning to us, isn't it? Just to be aware of those in the church and without whose message, whose ambition, whose ministry it seems to be just to cast doubt on the Bible.

They look at things that seem to you and me to be fairly plain and clear and straightforward and they just question it and question it and question it and question it.

Then you say, why are you questioning it? I'm just asking questions. But of course there's an agenda there, isn't there? There's an agenda of attrition to cast doubt on God's words.

We need to push on. And then there's ambition, isn't there? Verse 5, God is just trying to suppress you and keep you down. He knows that in the day that you take this fruit, you'll be like him, you'll be like God, you'll know good and evil.

Trying to stop you reaching your full potential, you too could be God. It just is Philip Pullman, isn't it? See, he's got his latest books out after his previous dark trilogy.

[24 : 37] Philip Pullman's basic thesis is that the fall was an upward fall. When Adam and Eve rebelled, that was a wonderful breakthrough moment. That was getting rid of God, getting rid of oppression and finding fulfillment and coming of age.

Don't be held back by God. This is the way to be fulfilled. This is the way to get the most out of life. But of course, having ignored God's warnings, having disobeyed God's commands, the result for Adam and Eve and for all of humanity that would follow was not a great liberation, was not a new and exciting life, but actually a world that quickly turned sour.

the consequences then, verses 7 to 19, we won't go into these in great detail, we don't have the time, but they are immediate and dramatic, aren't they?

Where they had life, verse 19, they will now face death. Where they had pleasure, they will now face pain, verse 16.

Where they had abundance, verse 17, they will now have toil. Work itself will be subject to frustration. Work that should have been fulfilling and invigorating and energizing and delightful will often now be hard and boring and monotonous and difficult and wearing.

[26 : 19] where they had harmony in relationships, verse 16, they will now have conflict. Where they had fellowship with God, they will now have separation.

And notice how as we read through these decrees of God and how the rebellion of humanity, how the consequences of sin would affect life, would affect Adam and Eve and the world they lived in. Notice how the very fabric of creation itself is damaged by this rebellion. So that sin's consequences go beyond just humanity, they actually distort everything.

You see, humanity was created back in Genesis chapter 1 as the representative head of creation, the apex to rule creation under God.

They had a distinct and unique role among everything that was created. God breathed his very spirit into them. And that meant that the fate and condition of the universe was always going to be tied to the fate and condition of humanity.

[27 : 43] Which meant that when Adam and Eve became dislocated from God, the whole of creation was put out of joint. Weeds, droughts, tsunamis are all indicative of that.

That's a reality which is picked up later in Romans chapter 8 in the New Testament when Paul writes, for the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice but by the will of the one who subjected it in hope that creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

See what Paul's saying there? He's saying that the whole of creation, the very fabric of creation, the very structures of nature itself have been brought into frustration because of the rebellion of humanity but it will be the liberation of humanity, it will be the revelation of the sons and daughters of the living God that will be the liberation ultimately of creation.

Creation will only be restored and healed when humanity is restored and healed. Now that doesn't mean that we shouldn't bother being good stewards of creation.

[29 : 15] Recycling is good, let me commend it to you. But of course it means that the world's ultimate hope and salvation is not in environmentalism, as useful and as worthy as that is, but actually an evangelism and men and women getting right with God.

things cannot continue as they had done. God will keep his words, the word that he gave in chapter 2 that if they rebelled against him, if they did not obey, they would die and God will keep his words. The fact is that relationship with God and consequently peace in this world were always dependent upon trusting God and acknowledging his good rule.

And the consequences of the fall, the consequences for work and for every aspect of our life that come in in Genesis chapter 3 and those verses from verse 14 onwards are not the spiteful revenge of a slighted God.

It wasn't God taking the huff and saying, well if you rejected me, just you wait. I'll get my own back. But those consequences were inevitable. You see, the world can only work well when it is in step with its maker and its sustainer.

[30 : 42] It's like removing the firewall from your laptop and then complaining that the programs have become corrupted. This self-declaration of independence from God could only ever be a disaster.

And of course it is the cause of everything that damages and spoils our world today. Every asylum, every hospital, every prison, every refugee camp, every police station, every slum, every employment tribunal, every sexual harassment claim.

And within a generation, chapter 4, you have the first grave. And then in chapter 5, you have a cemetery.

A world which is now full of alienation, distrust, conflict, and death. Well, where does this leave us? Where did it leave Adam and Eve and where does it leave us?

Well, Adam and Eve left them hiding, running from God, hoping, it's bizarre isn't it, that God would just kind of go away, that he might forget about them, that he might not have an interest in what had happened.

[32 : 00] And yet, so many people live life like that today, don't they? Have their head in the sand when it comes to God, hoping that perhaps they'll be able to make good with some metaphorical fig leaves of good works or a bit of religion.

People who are now detached from any great purpose, whether vacationally or morally, hoping that things will just work out okay, that God will leave them alone.

But of course, God won't go away. This is his world and you and I, as Adam and Eve, are responsible. We're accountable.

And God will ask the same question of every one of us that he asked of Eve. What is this that you have done? And yet in the middle of this judgment, this fear, the guilt, the alienation, there is incredible mercy, isn't there?

Even here, even in the darkest of all the chapters of the Bible, God shows his mercy, firstly, in barring the way to the tree of life. We see enough evil, don't we, in the years that we have.

[33 : 15] imagine if Stalin was still alive today. Imagine if he just lived on and on and on. Nobody wants that. There's mercy in the provision of clothing.

God giving practical care, even in the face of people that have snubbed him. Continues to care and to send the rain and the sunshine on the righteous and the wicked even today.

But of course the greatest mercy in Genesis chapter 3 is that despite all this, hope is not lost, that restoration is a possibility, that paradise can be regained, that intimacy with God could be restored. The promise is just a glimmer of course, we could easily miss it on the first reading, but it's there in verse 15, isn't it? The seed of the woman will crush the tempter's head, that from this humanity one would arise who would overturn the fall, who would overcome death, the devil and sin, but who would be wounded even as he did so.

And the hope of Genesis chapter 3 of course is the hope and the story of the rest of the Bible. And the glimmering promise in the ruins of Genesis chapter 3, even as humanity is driven out the garden, even as that way of life is cut off by the angel and the flashing sword, is that there can be a way back, but that the sword would need to be dealt with.

[34 : 56] And the way back to God, we could stop there, you know the rest, don't you? You can put two and two together, but for the avoidance of any doubt, the way back to God, of course, that one who was going to arise was the Lord Jesus Christ, born of a woman, the one who would destroy the works of the devil, the one who would bear God's punishment for sin, that we might be forgiven, the one who would give life to those under the sentence of death.

A world renewed, and a world that we can look forward to that will be recreated, a humanity that will be recreated, even as men and women are born again in the spirit, and look forward to that day of resurrection, and a world that will be free from frustration, a world where work itself won't be subject to frustration and difficulty and boredom and hassle, but actually will once again be enriching and joyful and fulfilling and glorious to the glory of God.

And may God bless these thoughts. from his words. Amen.