

Is There a Purpose in Work?

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening everyone. Are we well? It's great. We started at half past six with about half this number. It's amazing what happens in the ten minutes after the actual start of the evening service. It's great.

So welcome to you. If you've just joined us, my name is Graeme. I'm the pastor here at the church, Brunford Evangelical, and it's a joy to welcome you here on a Sunday evening. I love a Sunday evening because it is a wonderful chance just to still ourselves as we leave a busy week, a busy week in life, but it's also been a busy weekend for us as a church, and just to still ourselves as we sit on the cusp of, I'm sure, what is another busy week ahead of us.

It's a great time just to focus our minds and our hearts on our great and our awesome God. And it's a real joy this evening to introduce a new series that we're going to be doing this evening and the next four Sunday evenings called What a Way to Make a Living.

We have it on there. Here we go. What a Way to Make a Living. Now, hopefully that appeals to some of the Dolly Parton fans out there. What a Way to Make a Living. We're going to be thinking about how our Christian faith makes a difference to how we look at this thing that we call work.

The things that we do in the hours between waking up in the morning and going to bed in the evening. We're going to look at it quite broadly, I think, quite deliberately.

[1 : 25] The things that we do in life. And it's going to look differently for all of us, all at different stages of life, all doing many different things. For some of us, that is work means to go to the office.

For some of us, that means we go to study. Some of us will compose. Some of us will sing. Some of us will write. Some of us will think.

Some of us will work with other people. Some of us will work with our hands. Some of us will look after our home. Some of us will look after our family. Some of us will volunteer.

And I'm sure that for many of us, actually, it's probably a combination of a lot of those things. And this evening and in this series, we're going to ask the question, why? Why work?

And to get us thinking this evening, I thought I would give you some quotations I found this week from famous people in our world who have had a stab at answering that question, why work? You ready for these? We've got five of them.

[2 : 26] These are the people who are very influential in our culture. And many people look to as being able to tell them what life is all about. So here's the first one. Steve Jobs writes this.

The only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle. As with all matters of the heart, you'll know it when you find it.

Here's Russell Brand. No, there's not, actually. Here's David Brent. Here he is. You grew up.

This is him in the office. You grew up. You work half a century. You get a golden handshake. You rest a couple of years and you're dead. Here's Russell Brand. Read it this week, actually, him saying this.

I don't know if you read it on the BBC News. People are realizing, hold on a minute. Is it natural to work 12 hours a day? Here's Confucius. Choose a job that you love and you'll never have to work a day in your life.

[3 : 28] And lastly, and I'm sure you won't have heard of this guy, but I found him this week. David Brooks, a columnist for the New York Times. He was commenting on the saying that's popular in our culture. Listen to your inner voice.

Be true to yourself. Follow your passion. Your future is limitless. Well, he said this about that. That is garbage and nothing other than a middle class mantra. So why do we do that?

We do it because a lot of people in our world have got different things to say about work. Haven't they? So the question we need to ask ourselves as Christians here this evening is who is right?

Why work?

Now, I recently heard a Christian describe himself as an IKEA kind of Christian. And I thought to myself, what does he mean by that? He's an IKEA kind of Christian?

Does he like Swedish things? What does he mean? He's an IKEA kind of Christian. He wrote this. While I take something home from IKEA, I simply seek to follow the maker's instructions.

[4 : 24] That's good advice. Good advice. Well, in this series, we're going to be looking at the maker's instructions. What God, our creator, has to say in his words about work.

And what we're going to see as we look at his blueprint for work is that not only is what the Bible has to say about work wonderful, but actually what the Bible has to say about work is refreshingly realistic.

And tonight we're going to be thinking about God's original creation. If you've got a Bible, maybe you want to turn to Genesis chapter 1 just now.

We're going to be thinking about God's original creation, his good creation, his creation of Adam and Eve. And we're going to be thinking about the job that he gave them to do in his good creation. So in just a minute, Alistair's going to come up and he's going to read the verses from Genesis chapter 1, end of Genesis chapter 1, and the beginning of Genesis chapter 2 to us. But before we get there, let me just give you a little bit of a run up as to where we are in the Genesis narrative.

[5 : 30] Now, if you've got it there, Genesis 1 chapter 1. Sorry, Genesis 1 verse 1. The very first words of the Bible, in the beginning, God.

In the beginning, God. As my lecturer at Cornhill used to say, everything else is actually just a footnote to that. In the beginning, God.

For all eternity, God has existed. That's what that's saying. For all eternity, this God just has been. He has been there. And he's been living. He is a fully satisfied, loving community of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, the great three in one.

And God created the heavens and the earth. This is what we see as we read through Genesis 1. He created the heavens and the earth. So we discover from Genesis chapter 1 that the God of the Bible is a worker.

He made the universe. He made it out of nothing. Ex nihilo. It's the Latin term there. He made it out of nothing. By his powerful word, he spoke and things just came into being.

[6 : 36] The light. The stars. Now, I love how the author, if you want to check it out there, verse 16 of chapter 1. He also made the stars.

Just a throwaway comment, is it not? He also made the stars. Well, all of them? All of them? We get the impression that this was, God was just doing this effortlessly.

He also made the stars. Is he truly not an awesome God? This is the God that we meet in Genesis 1. This is our God. He made the light. He made the stars. He made the fish. He made the plants. All of it. And it's pleasing to him.

And that consistent chorus that the writer of Genesis 1 keeps bringing us back to. That beautiful melody. And God saw what he made. And what was it? It was good.

It was good. You get the sense as you read through Genesis 1 that God, he creates effortlessly. And more than that, he creates joyfully.

[7 : 38] His creation, it brings him delight. It showcases his splendor. It declares his glory. Those verses from Psalm 19 that Fiona read out at the start to set the tone.

Brilliant. So amazing how often the psalmist refrain comes back to the God of creation. Psalm 19. The heavens declare the glory of God. The skies proclaim the work of his hands.

This is our awesome God that we meet in Genesis 1. The heavens declare the glory of God. The skies proclaim the work of his hands. Creation is speaking.

It's speaking. It's speaking. What is it telling us? That our God, this God, is an awesome God. So we jump into the story at verse 26 of chapter 1.

Is this God's? He chooses to create man as the pinnacle of his good creation. Alistair, hand over to you.

[8 : 43] Well, let's pray, shall we, as we come to God's word now. Dear Father, we thank you so much, Lord, that you have given us your word that tells us what you are like.

And so this evening, dear Father, we ask as your creatures that you would help us grasp something more of your greatness. And you would help us grasp something more of our purpose as we study together this evening.

So be with us by your spirit, we ask. Would he be our leader? And would he be our teacher? And this is our prayer because we make it in Jesus' name. Amen. So I want to do just in the next 20 minutes or so, from that passage, if you want to have it open in front of you there, I just want to help us see three quick things from the verses that we've just read, before suggesting two principles that I think we can derive from these verses as we seek to apply this to our lives.

Especially as we think about Genesis 1 and 2, what it's teaching us about God's design for work. And the big thing that I want us to see this evening is that God has woven work into the fabric of his world.

God has woven work into the fabric of his world. So here we go. Firstly, verses 26 and 27, God makes. What does he make?

[10:09] He makes man. Now we learn from verse 27, mankind there, he made them male and female. And what did he make them in? Just get your head around this.

What did he make them in? Beginning of verse 26. Let us make them in our image. Worth pausing and just thinking about that for just a minute.

That every single human being has been made in the image of this triune God who we meet in Genesis 1. This loving community of the Godhead.

We were made in his image. Now that has massive ethical implications. That has massive moral implications. That has staggering spiritual implications for all of human life right there.

But let me just hone it down just a little bit. And as I was praying about this this week, it struck me that maybe there's some here tonight and you're thinking, I am not valuable.

[11:18] I am not valuable. Well, can I encourage you to dwell on what Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 is telling you about you? That you are no accident.

That you are not insignificant. That you are fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of this God who we meet here. This almighty. This awesome God. Now we'll see next week how sin entering the world has impacted things.

And we are broken human beings. But see here in God's good design that we are human beings who are beautiful simply because we've been made in the image of this God.

The fall may have messed things up, but all human beings still retain the image of God. I think C.S. Lewis captured it best. He called mankind a glorious ruin.

I think that captures it really well. A glorious ruin. How precious is that truth? Again, we see it through the psalm. Psalm 8. You hear the psalmist reflecting, What is man that you are mindful of him?

[12:19] And the son of man that you care for him. Yet you have made him a little lower than heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and splendor. Do you see the psalmist reflecting on that wonderful truth that God you made us?

I am made in your image. And it's really impacted me this week as I found myself just walking down the street. And as I've bumped into people, as I've seen people. As I'm thinking that every single human being has been made in the image of God.

Every single human being an image bearer of God. Every single human being valuable. Every single human being dignified. And we get it from here. Let us make man in our image.

And what did God make man to do? Do you see the word there? Have dominion. So God appoints man to rule over his good creation. Almost as his representative beings.

So God makes. And secondly, verses 28 to 31. Having created man in his image. God tasks. Three things God says to man about his good creation.

[13:27] Three things God tells man to do with his good creation. Firstly, fill it. Be fruitful and multiply. As creatures made in my image. Go ahead and fill the earth.

Fill my creation. Fill it with other image bearers of me. You see, God's desire is that the earth would be populated with people who all know him. Who all serve him.

And who all enjoy him together. Fill it. Secondly, use it. Subdue it. You see, God expects man to wisely cultivate and make useful the land that he has given them to have dominion over.

And they are to work at it. And do you notice how they are to use it for food? Do you see how God cares for man?

As he cares for Adam and Eve who he's made. He cares for them. He's protecting them. He's providing for them. Do you see verse 29? I have given it to you, says God.

[14:27] I have given you. Hinting at the enormous sense of privilege that man has in looking after God's glorious creation. But also the enormous sense of responsibility that man has in looking after God's good creation.

God is not only one who has created them. God is the one who has given them his creation to look after it and stewards. Do you see how they are to care for God's good creation?

As a direct response for their love for their creator. And all the time they are to do it walking in fellowship. Sweet fellowship with God who created them.

Loving fellowship with him. Fill it. Use it. Care for it. And in so doing, walk in relationship with your God. Enjoy him. Delight in him.

And bring glory to him through the way that you do that. And what does this make God's? Verse 31. Do you see it? He looks on his creation. And what does he declare? Whereas before it was good.

[15:28] What is it now? Somebody? It's very good. Do you see that God delights in what he has made? Very good.

And so God. Thirdly, verses 1 to 3 of chapter 2. He rests. God's work in creating is finished. And on the seventh day he rests from his work in creation. Do you see three times the word rest is mentioned there? Now for God to rest doesn't mean that he's slumped down on the couch like sometimes we would do at the end of a hard day exhausted.

This is not the kind of rest that's going on here. The effortless ease that we saw God create things in chapter 1 would suggest that that is not the case. Rather here is God having stopped working, standing back as it were and perceiving what he has made and delighting in it.

There's harmony. There's beauty. And God blesses the seventh day. And God makes it holy. You see the seventh day is a different day.

[16:36] It's as if the seventh day was designed specifically for the sweet fellowship between God and man as they live out enjoyment of God's world to exist.

God rests. You see how God has built this into the fabric of his world, into the rhythm of his creation. Now we don't have time to go into the Sabbath massively this evening, but let me just say this, that I think this speaks volumes.

A Christian understanding of rest volumes into our world that is bought into this crazy, crazy, crazy work ethic. What is it they call New York? The city that never sleeps.

I don't know how that works. But the city that never sleeps, because it's people that are so, so busy running around. And I often ask myself, am I any better than that?

As I run around from thing to thing, here is God who has built rest into the rhythm of his world. It's interesting, isn't it, that so often our world derives our identity from what we do.

[17:48] See, the call here of these verses to, as God's people, to be defined by not what we do, but whose we are. Now let me hit you with some geeky theology here, okay?

Article 1 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. I knew it was on your tongues. What is the chief end of man? Question. Answer. Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

Here is God's perfect world. Here it is. Now, we'll see next week how sin, the creature's rebellion against the creator, has broken the perfect harmony that exists here in God's original creation.

But for now, see how Genesis 1 and 2 show us how God is a worker, and that work is part of his good creation.

God has woven work into the fabric of his world. Now, the question I hope you're asking at this point is, how does a Christian understanding of how God created the world, how does a Christian understanding, viewing the world through this Genesis 1 and 2 mindset, how does it impact how you and I live today?

[18:59] Well, here are the two principles I was telling you about as we work towards a close.

Firstly, our work matters to God. A Christian understanding of God's good design shows us that there is dignity in work, that God created it, that it was part of his good design, that we are designed for it, and that work, which you and I do, whatever form that that takes, we were made by God to cultivate his good design.

We were made to be in community with others. We were made to stretch our imaginations. We were made to create. We were made to be pleased when things are done well, and because God designed it, do you see how God dignifies work?

Now, what did Jesus do while he was on earth? He worked as a carpenter. What a challenge that must have been to first century Greek thinking and culture, that God came to earth and God

worked.

And God worked with his hands. And what do we see the Apostle Paul doing as we meet him in the New Testament? What do we see him doing to fund himself in his missionary endeavors?

He works as a tent maker. God has dignified work. And God has dignified not just some work. God has dignified all work. All work.

[20 : 26] And I heard someone say recently in a conversation that 20, 30 years ago, that the second question you would ask somebody after, what is your name, is, who are your parents?

Now, the second question you ask somebody after asking them, what is your name, is, what do you do? Just an example of how our society derives our worth from what we do.

How easy is it to turn a good thing into a God thing? Because we live in a society that measures someone's worth by the job that they do in society. People in our culture deriving their identity from what they do.

That we list jobs in our mind, our society's trained us, to see some jobs as less glamorous, to see some jobs as more glamorous. Deriving your identity from what you do.

And I find this all the time. That people don't just derive their identity from what they do, they derive their identity from how busy they are doing what they do. I remember years ago when I started as a young lawyer meeting somebody who told me, I asked him, are you having lunch?

[21 : 34] And he said, no, life's too short for lunch. Life's too short for lunch. Very quickly, understanding the culture in my office was that it was a sign of weakness, that you must be very unbusy if you left before six o'clock in the evening.

Is this not true that we so often derive our identity from what we do, and how busy we are as we do what we do. But a good understanding of God's design of work in Genesis 1 and 2 shows us that all work, whatever we do in those waking hours that we have in the day, done in harmony with the task that God has given man, is dignified and it matters to God.

Whatever it is that we're doing, if we're doing it in line with the task that God has given man, that is dignified, that is a way we can glorify him. And as Christians, we believe in the sovereign goodness of God over our lives.

And that means that wherever he has placed us, in his purpose, according to his will, wherever we are, whatever we're doing, we can bring him glory by working in a way, a proper and fit way, which brings him glory.

So everyone, from the doctor to the dustman, from the parent to the postman, working for an audience of one, seeking to care and cultivate that particular part of God's good creation, that he has given us for his glory.

[22 : 55] There's a famous story told of the toilet cleaner, who worked at the NASA Space Center at Cape Canaveral in America. And someone once asked him what he did for a living. And he replied simply like everyone else, my job is simply to put a man on the moon.

Do you see it? Understanding the bigger picture of what's going on here. And so in the same way as we sit here tonight, as we sit here as diverse people, at different stages of life, doing different things with the hours of our days, we believe as Christians in the common goal, that we can bring God glory through what we do.

Our work, it matters to God. And secondly, God matters to our work. As Christians, as we grasp this Genesis 1 and 2 world feat, should make a real difference to the way that you and I live our lives.

You know what's really struck me this week? It's the sense of glorious responsibility that I have as one who's been made in God's image, living in God's world, to bring him glory with what he's given me.

And it's a responsibility, I think, that has got two axes to it. Now, if you were at the day away yesterday, these are the two axes that Bob, our speaker, picked up on. Firstly, there's the vertical axis, that I am responsible, I am accountable for what I do, what I've been given, and what I do with what I've been given.

[24 : 24] I'm responsible to God. So I've been asking myself this week, am I stewarding well the things that God has given me? Am I looking after well the things that God has given me?

Am I using the things that God has given me for his glory? How I conduct myself as a Christian? Do I seek to, to devote myself first and foremost, as a creature of God, to my creator?

How I am as a husband? How I am as a father? How I am as a son? How I work in the office? How I use my money?

How I use my time? How I use my possessions? Everything in my life that has been given to me on trust by God, it's not mine.

How often, we heard this this morning, didn't we? How often that we run around our world thinking that what we have is ours. It's not ours. It's on loan to us from God.

[25 : 29] We're going to have to give an account for how we've used it. And particularly, we're going to have to give an account for how we've used it for God's kingdom purposes. So the question of my mind has been, am I seeking to use the opportunities that God has given me in life?

Am I seeking to use the resources that God has given me in life in line with God's will for the glory of God and for the expansion of his kingdom throughout the world? Now just think about your own life for a minute.

What's that going to look like? What the Lord, by his grace, has given you? What has he given you to steward for his glory?

You see how this world view it, this truth that we know as Christians, it should make a way, it should make a difference, rather, sorry, to the way that we view what we have. And I've been embarrassed this week to find out my own life as I've asked those seeking questions.

How often is that? It's just never on my radar. It's just never on my radar. And so my prayer this week has been, Lord, would you help, by your grace, put it on my radar.

[26 : 43] Secondly, it's a responsibility with a horizontal axis. To care for God's good creation. To conduct myself in a way that looks after his creation, because I recognize just that, that it's his creation.

And if I'm to take the words of Scripture seriously, if I'm to take the words of Psalm 19 seriously, that this creation of his is declaring his glory to a watching world. And I think in particular I've been challenged this week with how I care for his creation, particularly how I care for other human beings as part of his creation.

Made in the image of God, as part of God's good creation, with whom I share this world. How do I relate to others? How am I loving others? Am I interested in others?

Am I concerned about others? Am I praying for others? Am I seeking to love others? Again, how often is that just not on my radar? This has been such a challenge to me this week. Do you see how this Genesis 1 and 2 framework, it should challenge us as we look at God's good design for his world, as we think, conscious of those two axes, the horizontal axis, the vertical axis, how it should challenge us?

The Genesis 1 and 2 blueprint with a Genesis 1 and 2 goal, what a difference that should make to our lives. Those looking on to our lives, those that we witness to in the office that we rub shoulders with, but those who look on, our family and friends, as they look at the way that we live our lives, they should ask why.

[28 : 17] Our work matters to God. That's why. And God matters to our work. That's why. God has woven work into the fabric of his world.

Now I'll give you a list of quotes at the start. Here's just one more. In fact, there's two more, okay? Two more. Here's British businessman Philip Green, owner of the Arcadia Group.

So we've got Topman and Wallace and whatnot, the Arcadia Group. He writes this about work. It's all about quality of life and it's all about finding a happy balance between work and friends and family.

You heard that one before, something similar to that? Well, hopefully we've seen tonight that as Christians armed with our Bibles and informed by God's revelation of who he is and how he's created things, we know and we've seen that there's so much more to God's design for work than simply about me and my quality of life.

You know, a lesser known fact about me is that when I grew up, I used to play the saxophone. I'm not auditioning for the band, that's not what I'm doing there.

[29 : 26] I used to play the saxophone, I used to really love playing the saxophone. One of the jazz musicians who I still love to this day, I love to listen to, is a man called John Coltrane. Some of you may have heard of him, some of you might not.

Something to do on Spotify or YouTube when you get home. John Coltrane, fantastic jazz musician. And his most famous and most loved album is called A Love Supreme.

And this is how, I don't know if you've noticed it sometimes in CDs, the artists put the kind of this is who it's to in the inside cover of their CD. It's to my mum, it's to my brother, whatnot, they say that.

Well, this is what John Coltrane writes and I've kind of modernised it in terms of it's English so you can understand what he's saying.

This is John Coltrane. This album is a humble offering to God. It's an attempt to say thank you, God, with my work just the same as I do with my heart and my tongue.

I think John Coltrane's grasped Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. What a glorious God that Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 presents us with. He is an awesome God.

[30 : 33] We'll see next week how Genesis 3, sin entering the world has significantly changed things but for now, what a brilliant task God has given to his creatures to fill and to use and to care for his good creation.

And while they do that, first and foremost, all the while, seeking to walk in sweet fellowship with the God who created them. To do what they do to live their lives for the glory of God.

What a beautiful picture Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 paints us. This is our God. This is our God.