

Created for Stewardship

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Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0 : 00] Welcome everyone. My name's Steve. I haven't met you before. I'd be grateful if you had your Bibles open to that section. We are working our way through the early chapters of the book of Genesis. We'll be lingering in these chapters for a couple of weeks. So it'd be great if you had your Bibles open. And also the St. Paul's app will give you an outline for today's message. The song Friday On My Mind was released in 1966 by the Australian band The Easy Beats. It sat at position number one on the list of Australia's all-time favourite songs for over four decades. And the reason for that, according to those who study such things, is it catches something of the mindset of Australian culture. On Monday, I've got Friday on my mind. That is, the day I start working, I can't wait to finish working. I think about the day when I stop working. Early retirement, in fact, in our culture is the ultimate thing to aspire to. It's even an idol in our culture, because anything is better than having to work. And so what we're going to do today in this text is look at a couple of the key words that keep coming up in Genesis 1 and 2, the key words of work and rest. And I think it's a subject that's relevant for many of us today. There used to be such a thing called the 40-hour work week.

Unless, of course, you worked for the government, it was 38 hours. True, I used to work for the government once upon a time, 38 hours. And so it's like, what happened to that? The rhythms, there used to be a rhythm, if you like. And even in ministry, when I first started ministry 30 years ago, there was this rhythm of work, rest, and play, and that almost doesn't exist anymore. What's happened? What's going on? Families and communities are suffering because of a culture of work in our society. So I've got three points on the app, called to work, how to work, and working well. So called to work.

As part of the image bearing that we see there in the creation, people are called to work. God himself works. Genesis 2.2. By the seventh day, God had finished the work he'd been doing, and on the seventh day, he rested from all his work. God works. And although we read there that God ceased his creating activity on the seventh day of creation, we are told in John 5.17 that God continues to work.

He still works. In fact, as the Lord of creation who upholds everything by the power of his word, if he ever ceased to work, everything we know now would dissolve into nothingness.

He continues to uphold the universe as it is. And so this is an amazing statement here. What is so amazing about Genesis 2.2?

[3 : 23] In creation accounts of Eastern culture, for instance, the Babylonian creation account, probably the most famous Eastern creation account, called Eluma Elish, humanity is created as a primitive, lowly creature for the purpose of laboring to keep the world going so that the gods don't have to do anything. That's why humanity was created.

And for creation accounts like Eluma Elish, work is considered bad, primitive, terrible.

The divines don't work. On the other hand, on the creation accounts in Western culture, like those of Greco-Roman culture, the most famous of Greco-Roman culture creation account is Pandora's box.

Zeus gives Pandora this box. It was actually a jar, really, but it's become known as a box. And Zeus says, open it. And she opens it.

And what comes out of the Pandora's box is all this bad stuff. Death, disease, decay, and work.

[4 : 45] And so in the Greek myths, work is bad. Eastern and Western, work is bad.

And Genesis 1 is the opposite. Work is good. Genesis tells us that work is something that our creator God actually does.

It is something good. In chapter 2, verse 7, we read, Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

The man became a living being. I said last week that the book of Genesis, before anything else, it is about God.

It is the beginning of the doctrine of God. First and foremost, his name, God is referred to 35 times in the first chapter.

[5 : 52] And there is something really interesting that we note here about God. Up to this point in Genesis, Moses has used the name Elohim for the name of God.

Up to this point. It's a name that portrays God's majesty as the creator of all that is.

It signifies a omnipotent deity. But from chapter 2, verse 4, which technically is actually the beginning of chapter 2.

We won't get into that. The guy who originally put the chapter headings in the Bible, because it never used to have chapter headings. It wasn't written with chapter headings. And when he put the chapter headings in, the guy who did that, apparently did it on horseback.

So, you know, we're cutting some slack here. Chapter 2, verse 4, the name of God switches to Yahweh Elohim, the Lord God.

[7 : 02] And so from chapter 2, verse 4, to the end of chapter 4, the dominant name for God is Yahweh Elohim. And it's a combination of the creator God and the covenant-keeping relational God.

And the God of Genesis, therefore, is not a distant, cruel, angry God who creates primitive beings to do his labor.

He is a God who is powerful but very good. He is a God who is humble and gentle of heart. And we get a glimpse of that, the first glimpse of it, in chapter 2, verse 7.

This is such an interesting contrast to Greek philosophical thinking, which says manual work is bad. Manual work is a curse. Manual work is a punishment. Chapter 2, verse 7, God stoops down into the soil and forms man.

[8 : 19] This God is a God who's got dirt under his fingertips. Humanity is the apex of God's creation, creating the image of God.

According to verses 26 and 28 of chapter 1, we are his image bearers, and part of our purpose as his image bearers is to rule the created order.

We are God's royal figures, his vicegerents over creation. We exercise a delegated power on behalf of our God.

And then from verse 8, we see in verse 2 that God is the God who plants the garden. And then he puts Adam in it and tells him to be the gardener.

All work, including manual work, is part of paradise. And all work is held up as good.

[9 : 29] It is part of God's good creation. This is so different than the way we think of things in our world. For instance, in communist ideology, professionals are disdained.

Manual workers are disdained in capitalism. But in biblical Christianity, all work is good, and all work has dignity.

So then how should we work? That's my second point. I want to touch briefly on three practical things on how we should go about our work. Really simply, look in, look out, look up.

That's really the three points, really briefly. This is how we go about our work and what the Bible says about the nature of things. So look in, that is, look into what you're gifted to.

Take a look at chapter 1, verse 26. Then God said, let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule. God's image is that he is the creator and ruler of all that he's made.

[10 : 41] And so he makes humanity in his image and he makes us rulers of all that he's made. We are all made in the image of our creator and so we create.

The Hebrew word for God creating in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 is that he creates out of nothing.

That's his creative work. Ex nilio. It is out of nothing. Nothing exists and he creates. And that's used three times in Genesis 1 and 2, that word.

Three times. All referring to God's creating work. But there's a heap of other words that are used in Genesis 1 and 2. Words like form, make, separate, shape.

And they are used of both God and people. So the truest sense of our humanity's creating work is to make, is to sub-create, if you like.

[11 : 46] God's creative work is to make something entirely new from no matter at all and only God can do that. To sub-create is to make something relatively new using existing material.

And sub-creating is what the spirit does in chapter 1 verse 2. Hovering over the empty matter and bringing order from chaos, newness out of unformed material.

And every human being, in some way, has a desire to reflect that work of God. It might be developing a product.

It might be starting a business. It might be creating a piece of, or sub-creating a piece of art. It might be turning around a dysfunctional work team or a dysfunctional partner, a department, or a dysfunctional organisation.

It might be an educator bringing out the potential in a student, a medical professional bringing order to a broken body, a therapist bringing order to a broken mind.

[13 : 00] I could go on and on and on and on and on. A mother changing, or a father actually, I don't want to get, changing a nappy. Changing a nappy to bring disorder from this mess.

You could go on. It could be bringing order to gardens and buildings and people's hair and clothing and raising. I mean, you just go on bringing. That is the work of sub-creating.

As I mentioned last week, in Greek philosophy, divides the world into the spiritual being good and the physical being bad.

It is not biblical Christianity at all. There is something very physical about the work of spiritual work that I do.

And there is something deeply spiritual about the physical work you do. And I do. God does not divide between the secular and the sacred.

[14 : 07] It is not biblical Christianity to do that. So as a Christian, if you are not well, pray to God about your sickness and go to the doctor.

And go to the doctor. You are not being super spiritual. You are not being more spiritual. You're not being more mature by not going to the doctor.

If your car breaks down, pray about it, but call a mechanic. God has gifted humanity for the work of bringing order out of chaos.

That's his job. That is our job. So look into how God has gifted you in that space. I am so deeply thankful for the people who bring order in my life amongst the chaos in all kinds of way.

The legal professionals who jump in when there's legal disorder. for Craig, sitting over here, the work that he does, most of us are not even aware of.

[15 : 32] We get to sit in an ordered building because of this guy. We get to enjoy ordered grounds because of this guy. You ought to be praising his work as much as mine.

Or more, if you don't praise mine at all. Look out is the second point to a world around you and give the world what it needs to have.

Chapter 2, verse 15, the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work and take care of it. To take care of it, not to abuse it, not to exploit it, not to use it.

And this is the issue of stewardship. We are stewards of God's resources. We are stewards of God's gifts that he's given us for a higher purpose. our own glorification but for the creating of order in society, in his world.

You see, the first point of looking in to see how God gives me really does suit the Western individual mindset really well. Thanks for that, Steve.

[16 : 38] Let's finish the sermon there. But this one about the rest of the... Not so much. And this is the balance. work is not just about using my gifts and fulfilling me.

It is about working for the good of others. So the biblical view of work is we are stewards of the world and the people around us.

How is my work in contributing to the advancement of society? How is it contributing to the advancement of society?

That's a question for you before you go to work tomorrow morning. Or if you're not sure, ask me, I can tell you. In one way or another, it's really... I mean, it's clear.

I mean, my optometrist over here helps me to see things so I can write sermons and read. Get a greater glimpse of the world. Bringing order out of chaos.

[17 : 42] The last one is to look up to the one who has called you. There is to be a sense of mission or purpose to our work. Ephesians 2.10, we are God's handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.

The Christian perspective on work is that if we look in and see the way God has gifted us, if we look out to make a difference to those gifts in the wider world to bring order to chaos, then we know ultimately that God will use that work.

And if we work like this, we will be content with our vocation in life. But we need all three things together. All three of them.

And that moves me here to the final point. Because what I've just said can seem so unrealistic. There is certainly truth in that thought. Frankly, for me personally, I have a job that ticks all the boxes for me. My vocation in life ticks all the boxes for me.

[18 : 55] But even so, every single job, every single vocation can be unbelievably frustrating. And at times crushing.

And filled with all kinds of difficulty and anxieties. I fully understand that our work can hurt us. It can drain us.

It is so frustrating. And yet, we haven't got to the rest of the Bible yet, which is so realistic about this. Work will never be the good it was created to be unless we see that what we need in our hearts in order to work well.

So let's move to the third point on working well. What we need in our hearts to work well is rest. That's what we need. Genesis 2, 2-3. By the seventh day, God had finished the work he had been doing. And so on the seventh day, he rested from all his work.

[20 : 13] Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. God finished his work and he rested.

It is the only day of creation that God blesses. He made the seventh day holy. That means it's been set apart and it's been set apart for us.

Unlike the previous six days, the number of the day of this particular day, day seven, is repeated three times in Genesis 2 and 3.

Chapter 2, 2 or 3. The seventh day stands apart in solidary grandeur as the crown to the six days of creating.

God's rest here is one of deep pleasure and satisfaction at the fruit of his labor. From the beginning of creation, the seventh day was central not only to creation but to the ultimate destiny of all of humanity.

[21 : 34] We can read in these two chapters a rhythm of work and rest and it's certainly good for all people to practice it. But the Bible tells us there's more to this rest than is immediately obvious here.

Immediately obvious. if we truly want to be able to work as we have seen here then we need to have a truly Sabbath rest, a deep Sabbath rest.

Let's just dig a little bit deeper on that. Psalm 95 is all about worship. Psalm 95 all about worship. At the end of the psalm we read something that's a little unusual. I'll paraphrase it a little bit for us. Hear his voice. Do not harden your hearts as your ancestors did.

So I declared on oath in my anger they shall never enter my rest. It's all about worship and God says they have rejected me and therefore they will never enter rest.

[22 : 50] It doesn't end there though. If you go further into the Bible Hebrews chapter 3 and 4 it says there that there is still a rest for the people of God.

What's that all about? Well jump back into Psalm chapter 3 verses 5 and 6 this is David I lie down and sleep I wake again because the Lord has sustained me throughout my sleep I will not fear though tens of thousands assail me on every side.

So here's David saying I am surrounded by tens of thousands of enemies and I'm sleeping like a baby. Apologies if your baby does not sleep that well.

The Psalmist is talking here about deep deep rest of the soul. Deep rest of the soul a rest that we all need and a rest that so many do not have.

And it plays out in our work. She's one of the biggest selling female artists of all time having sold over 400 million albums around the world.

[24 : 21] She's done TV work, film work, launched her own line of clothing, her career has expanded more than four decades and she's won multiple Golden Globes and Grammys.

But Madonna still can't find rest. When Madonna was in the heyday of her cultural significance she gave a now famous interview with I think it was Vanity Fair or Vogue for me I don't care.

She said what she said there about her work was very sobering. I have an iron wheel and all of my will has always been to conquer some horrible feeling of inadequacy.

I'm always struggling with that fear. I push past one spell of it and discover myself as a special human being and then I get to another stage and I think I'm mediocre and uninteresting. My drive in life is from this horrible fear of being mediocre and that's always pushing me pushing me because even though I become somebody I still have to prove that somebody.

[25 : 29] My struggle has never ended and it probably never will. that was her answer to the question of why do you work so hard?

Harold Abrahams was an English athlete who won the 100 metre gold medal at the 1924 Paris Olympics. What was his motivation to work so hard train so hard?

He was asked that question what drove you? He said quote I've got 10 seconds to justify my existence. You see on top of the work that we do our vocations in life is this deeper work that's going on in the soul.

A work that sits under all of that work and for most part for the most part it's unseen. so many of us unaware that we're not actually just working in our vocations we're working deep in our souls at the same time.

The atheist Stephen J. Gould put it like this we're here because one odd group of fishes had a peculiar fin anatomy that could transform into legs for terrestrial creatures.

[26 : 54] Because the earth never froze entirely during an ice age because our small and tenuous species arising in Africa a quarter of a million years ago has managed so far to survive by hook or by crook we may yearn for a higher answer but none exists.

This explanation though superficially troubling is ultimately liberating we have to construct therefore any meaning ourselves. And he's absolutely right.

If you want to begin with the premise that there is no creator God that it's all an accident a freak accident then you have to construct meaning for yourself because no other meaning exists.

That is the bedrock of secularism. There is no such thing as purpose in life and Stephen Jay Gould is one of the few atheists who actually will acknowledge that or did acknowledge it.

And so many of us in our productivity driven western world are trying to construct that meaning out of our work.

[28 : 10] Out of our vocation out of our stages in life out of our gifting. There is a deeper work going on that our vocations feed into and that we actually try to extract from our work.

And that is what makes our work such a burden such a mess so far from the ideal. If anything goes wrong with our work then our sense of self becomes unraveled.

When we retire our sense of purposelessness increases. Our identities get rocked. This is where the Christian teaching on creation and work is just so helpful for our sense of being.

in Genesis 2 when God finishes the sixth day of creating he effectively declares it is finished.

It's done. Centuries later the same God cries out the same words it is finished. The first time God got rest because of creation the second time Jesus Christ calls out it is finished on the cross so that we could have deep soul rest.

[29 : 34] Hebrews 4 verse 9 puts it like this. There remains then a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their work just as God did from his.

See the rest of Hebrew 4 tells us that we can enter God's eternal rest the purpose of creation right now in Jesus Christ.

Right now. The approval that every human being needs is to be approved in God's heart.

The significance that we really need is the significance that we get from God's eyes. The security that we need is the security of being wrapped in God's arms. work will never ever give it to us.

God's work is finished on the day of creation and the day of redemption. The Lord God is Yahweh Elohim.

[30 : 39] He is our creator and our redeemer. In Jesus Christ our existence is justified before we even get up in the morning and head to work.

He is our existence and he is our justification. He is not our work. Religion turns even him into a work. We will never have joy and freedom and rest in our work until we realize that the deepest work, the work to redeem and to justify our souls has already been fully completely accomplished and finalized in Jesus.

And so what Jesus does is he calls us to come to him. Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

He offers us deep deep rest because he took our burden. A rest that's so deep that your world can move into chaos.

[32 : 03] Your workplace, your vocation can move into chaos and yet you can still have rest. He was crushed for our sin, he shouldered our burden. So how do we know that we are truly resting in the finished work of his redemption and not just his creation?

Well, for a start we can take time off. We can stop and we commune with him.

If we do not stop from all of our work to be with God, God, it's one of the first signs that we do not have spiritual rest in Jesus.

Our experience of rest is proportionate to our trusting in him. Our wholehearted trust brings rest to our souls in all of its divine, cosmic, and ideal dimensions.

as the great Saint Augustine said, our hearts are restless until they find rest in God. Life apart from Jesus is constant striving, and we will remain restless no matter what we obtain or what we attain in this world.

[33 : 30] And so Jesus calls you, the weary, the burdened, to come to him and receive the gift of rest. His deepest heart towards you is not to lump you with more work.

His deepest heart towards you is gentleness and humility and rest. Come, follow Jesus, treasure Jesus, and find rest for your souls.

Amen.