

Work, Vocation & the Gospel

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[0:00] Alright, well, let's get started. So, I'll say good morning and welcome to our third class in this Sunday School Series on Work, Vocation, and the Gospel. And for those who may have missed the first two classes, I just wanted to go through first a reminder of where we are in the course.

So, in the first class, the focus was on the design of work, and we covered a few defining characteristics about how God designed work, or how work was intended by God. I think the first one was that work is good, that God works and he delights in his work. Second, that we were created to work, that work is not incidental to a meaningful life, it is actually central to it. The third, God calls us to a variety of work. We saw that in the garden, where Adam's task included both intellectual and physical labor in naming the animals and tending the ground. And there is no hierarchy between these forms of work. And then finally, we explore the fact that work comes with God-given limits that remind us that we are not masters of ourselves, or of our work, and keep us oriented and dependent on God who calls us to work.

[1:13] Then last week, Alex picked up this theme by continuing focusing particularly on the concept of work as a calling. And as you may remember, he distinguished between vocation and occupation.

Because in the context of work, he wanted to separate our occupation as what we get paid for, and then vocation to really get at the heart of the sense of God's calling to us for work.

And in that class, I think he talks about a couple of things. First, our primary calling is a relationship with God. As important as work is, that's not the ultimate calling.

And an implication because of the gospel of grace is that because there is nothing we can do to earn God's favor, there is no separation between spiritual work and physical work.

Because God calls us to work to advance His good creation, and as such, we can embrace and explore all classes of work in continuing to pursue God's design and further His plan for us to cultivate the earth.

[2:27] So in this class, I would not go back to that difference between occupation and vocation. It's useful when we want to make that distinction, but it would not be as relevant in this class.

We would just talk about all of it in the context of work. And so all we have said in the first two classes point us to the goodness of work as God meant it to be.

Anybody whose work will be the first to admit that we don't always experience our work in this way. I think some of you may remember, maybe about a decade or so ago, there was a meme that used to make its rounds on the internet that highlighted the mixed experience of work from several perspectives.

And it would typically start with the profession like teacher, and then go through these cycles, this six panel cycle of what my friends think I do, what my boss thinks I do, what my mom thinks I do, and then what society thinks I do, what I think I do, and then finally what I actually do.

I try to look for a couple of them, but it may take a long time to pass it around and discuss. But there was one example that I was looking up, and teacher, if I go back to the example of teacher, it would show what my friends think I do is like Einstein scribbling on the wall.

[3:48] And then what I think I do, I think I'm like Robin Williams in Good Will Hunting, where I am inspiring students to a much higher level of aspiration or Robert Sean Leonard in the Dead Poets Society.

And then it pans to what I actually do, which is spend a lot of my time just grading papers and responding to requests from parents for extensions and homework. I see Amanda laughing. I'm sure that she experiences much of that.

But the memo, what I said, the meme, while it cheekily reflects what we experience as the brokenness of work, it is then, this is that to which we turn to today.

Work is broken. We all experience it. And so we're going to experience how and why work is broken, and then see how we can recover God's design for work, even amidst this brokenness of work.

But before we do so, let us turn to Lord in prayer. Lord, we thank you for your good design for work. And we ask that even as we look closer at the ways in which our experience of it departs from your good and beautiful design, we pray you open our eyes and our hearts to see ways you still remain at work through our work, to further your good purposes for creation. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

[5:10] Amen. Alright. So, recognizing that work is broken, like I just said, is no surprise to anyone who's worked, those of us who are Christians and those who are not, right?

Happy Friday is a more common greeting than Happy Monday, for example. But I imagine if you ask people for why work is broken today, you are likely to get a range of responses. Some people will readily trace it to systemic issues. They will see the brokenness of work as a result of us being in an economic system that is geared towards the radical pursuit of efficiency, and that treats human beings like mindless machines in the pursuit of greater profits retained by a certain class.

Others may be quicker to turn to more specific explanations. They see work as broken because of specific contextual issues, have a bad or incompetent manager, or the incentives at work are misaligned.

They are suboptimal organizational and HR processes that together degrade the experience of the employees who work there. And then while there is some truth in these and many other responses that people give, the Bible traces it to something that is more fundamental, which is the consequences of sin.

[6:34] God's good design for work became broken as a response to man's disobedience. And, you know, we started exploring the design of work by looking at the creation story, the creation narrative in chapter 2 of Genesis.

And we see this brokenness and the consequence almost immediately in the continuation of the narrative in Genesis 3. After God had created man and given them work to do in the garden, they disobeyed him by eating of the fruit of the tree that he had commanded them not to.

And after his judgment to the serpent and the woman, God turns to Adam and he says, starting in Genesis 3 from verse 17, verse 17, In other words, as Tim Keller puts it in the book that accompanies the series, the first way work is broken is that work becomes fruitless.

And while the passage that we just read focuses on the direct experience of fruitless toil for Adam in his particular work in that time as a gardener, Keller broadens the definition of fruitlessness in this way.

And by fruitless we mean that in all our work we will be able to envision far more than we can accomplish, both because of a lack of ability and because of resistance in the environment around us.

[8:39] The experience of work will include pain, conflict, envy and fatigue, and not all our goals will be met. In other words, fruitlessness in work does not mean that our work will yield nothing, but that it will generally yield less than we anticipate.

We work really hard, but sometimes it doesn't feel like there is very much to show for it. And one illustration of this is a short story that Tolkien wrote, which Keller retells in the introduction of the book.

It's called Leaf by Neagle, and it's a story about a painter named Neagle who had a masterpiece picture in his mind of a magnificent tree that he hoped to paint before he died.

But despite his best efforts, all he was ever able to end up painting was just a mere leaf of that magnificent tree, to his great disappointment.

Almost in parallel, Catherine Alsdorf, who is Keller's co-author and who wrote the foreword of the book, she also described something similar in her experience when she was launching a start-up in the early 2000s, in the middle of what was called then the dot-com boom that ultimately failed.

[9:55] As she says, after 18 months of relentless work, the company failed. We were part of the internet bubble, and when it burst, it took us with it. While we got our product to market on schedule, we couldn't raise the additional money we needed after venture capital dried up.

We retained bankers to shop for a buyer that would enable us to at least keep the product going, keep some of the staff working, and provide some return to our investors. However, the fears in the market scared off the buyer we had been courting just days before signing the deal.

I had to lay off 100 people the next day, and then sell off our intellectual property. Now, the experience of fruitlessness is made even more challenging because it's not always driven by factors under our control.

As Al Zoff described, unlike many of the start-ups at the time, they actually released the product on time and on schedule, and yet their efforts failed.

Now, I imagine there are a couple of sports fans among us who are watching match madness. You don't have to admit if you're not. But you know this, especially if you follow any sport, that teams, even with better records, deeper benches, and more rigorous conference programs will still end up failing or losing out, even to teams that are not as good as they are.

[11:20] So if fruitlessness is one way... Sorry, I'm not sure why I'm coughing. But if fruitlessness is one way that work is broken, we may be tempted, actually, to think that if we found ways to avoid it, say by overcoming some of our personal shortcomings or our skill limitations, or if we find ways to avoid the external factors that make work futile, say, like in a Catherine Owsdorf case, maybe she had been a final investor, we may be able to return to God's grand design for work.

But alas, this is not so. Because even those who enjoy fruitfulness in their work far beyond their imagination, they still encounter work's brokenness, though in a different way.

And that is when work becomes futile or pointless. There is perhaps no clearer example of this experience in Scripture than the author of Ecclesiastes, who after attempting to find meaning in life through the pursuit of learning and wisdom, and then through the pursuit of pleasure, he turns to work.

And in chapter 2 of the book, he describes it as follows. It says, I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. I made myself gardens and parks and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees.

I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves and had slaves who were born in my house. I also had great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem.

[12:59] I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines in the light of the sons of man.

So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it. And behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool. Yet he will be master of all for which I toil and use my wisdom under the sun.

This also is vanity. So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun. Because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it.

This also is vanity and a great evil. What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun?

[14:13] The author of Ecclesiastes clearly enjoyed significant fruitfulness. He planted so many successful projects that he did and experienced a lot of it, of good fruit from his work. But in the end, he found the work meaningless and vanity, a toiling and striving of the

heart.

This experience is not unique to the author of Ecclesiastes. It's still particularly resonant today. So if you consider Michael Phelps, who is the most decorated Olympian of all time, a total of about 28 medals and the record for most gold medals ever, 23.

He has described the futility and depression he's felt even after realizing some of his dreams as follows. And I paraphrase this a bit. He said, you work so hard for four years to get to that point. And then it's like, you're at the top of the mountain. You're like, what am I supposed to do? Where am I supposed to go? Who am I? And elsewhere, he said again, referring to his post success blues, a dramatic emptiness.

You work as hard to potentially win a gold medal. And then the next day, you're done. That's it. This phenomenon is also not unique to Michael Phelps. In fact, it has been studied enough that it has a name in psychology.

[15:30] And it's pithily called the arrival fallacy. And in the New York Times article on the subject, the author quotes the psychologist who coined the term as defining it as the illusion that once we achieve a goal or reach a destination, we will reach lasting happiness.

The author actually quotes a study as well in which it was found that professors who had either received or been denied tenure in the preceding five years reported similar levels of happiness, whereas assistant professors who had not yet been considered for tenure consistently overestimated the amount of joy they expected to receive from that event.

Jim Carrey, who some of you may remember, was one of the biggest stars in Hollywood in the 90s. He once said, I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer.

So we experience work as futile and pointless as the corruption of sin in this case also tempts us to place our expectations of joy, identity and fulfillment in a gift rather than the giver himself.

Nothing besides God is large enough to bear the weight of our need for identity and meaning.

Nothing besides God is large enough to bear the weight of our need for the purpose of sin. As Augustine said in the Confessions in this famous quote, Thou movest us to delight in praising thee, for thou hast formed us for thyself and our hearts are restless till they find rest in thee.

[17:06] Let me pause here. Are there any questions or any thoughts or reactions on this experience of work? So I think the spread of the Christian idea, if I can call it that, Christianity, right, tends to foster this idea of arrival.

Because the Christian faith teaches that there is a final and ultimate arrival. And as that kind of percolates through culture into other religions, other peoples, other nations that are not particularly Christian or even not Christian at all.

So they too begin to adapt this idea of an arrival. But those arrivals that they set up are ultimately disappointing.

So in a sense, Christianity is to blame for the arrival fallacy. Hmm.

That is a provocative statement. I think there is something there. I don't know if anybody has, it feels like there were opposing thoughts.

[18:35] Well Christians are the only ones who have the concept of our expectations are out of line. Hmm. So people all over the world think if they just get to the next thing they'll be happy.

But then you reach your seventies. And you know. You have many experiences of having realized that the things of this world will not ultimately make you happy.

I think the problem is not with the desire of the point. I think it's like many things in our lives, in our life of the world.

The problem is that it's almost like the world or the devil, whoever, like perverses that initial desire.

So the problem is not to love someone. It's trying to love someone in the wrong way, in the way that the world says that it is not how the Bible told us to love someone.

[19:37] The problem is not trying to get to a point. The Bible says that we should shine light in the light of the world.

The perfect life. The day we try to pursue something. And if the Bible tells us how to pursue things.

So the problem is not the desire itself. It's how the world gets a true statement and perverts it to the wrong goal. Hmm.

Hmm. Hmm. Hmm. Anyone else? I thought someone. Good job.

Enthusiastes is pretty Christian. Wouldn't you say it's an idea of kind of the arrival, the desire for an arrival that ultimately feels empty.

[20:34] It's kind of, that idea is there. Um. Well, I don't know that I would say it is Christian as it is an exploration of life under the sun.

I mean, that was like a pretty frequent refrain throughout the book. And that refrain is meant to point to, in some way, life apart from God. If life under the sun, all the life that we can see is all there is. What does that have? How does that impact the way we see and experience life? And then it's an exploration of that. And it comes back to the end. Um.

There is more to life. Um. It's only when you see life outside of it just being under the sun, do we find meaning. Um. But there was an entire sermon series on this, which I would not do justice to in like two sentences.

So, um. But, but I think it is a provocative, um, perspective of what does it mean if in some way like the material world is all there is. And I think we find that it is actually meaningless.

[21:38] Yes. Yeah. I think, um, like work will bring like wealth, fame, reputation, status, but I think from a Christian perspective, we, we take it as a, as a gift.

It's like, because ownership is always to God. Um. Mm-hmm. Um. It's like, when you were given with all of that, you, you take good care of them, but you won't transfer the ownership to yourself. And then you, you feel, that's part of my achievement. Um. Um. Yeah. So then you still feel like the service to God.

Well, um, being, feeling fruitful. Mm-hmm. You're in the world because you're, you're glorified. You're glorified God. Yeah. So you're giving the, the capability and opportunity to, to serve Him, which is the real way.

Yeah. I, I agree that, uh, those material things will bring happiness somehow, but like the eyes on God and being given this, uh, a chance is way more important than those things.

[22:54] Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I think, Richard, I, I, I'm just reflecting on your, on your comment.

The idea that came to mind is like saying that gravity is responsible for plane crashes. It is true, but that's not the entire picture.

I think it is when we, you, in some way, even in describing it, describe, you, you kind of touch on what I think is why. The, the experience is there. People try and divorce even that expectation from the giver of it.

And actually it will matter the good gift. When it is divorced from the giver, which is God, uh, we will explore that later actually in, I mean, in the next class on, that is the fundamental, um, beginning of idolatry.

Right. And then when you divorce it, it loses all of its power. God gave them a good garden, but when they decided to pursue, um, their own desires away from, um, the limits that God had given them, that was when it broke.

[24:01] And that brokenness still continues today. And to your point, it's a brokenness that is in our hearts because even we today can understand, we can relate to the fact that there are things that God gives us that we sometimes try to grab outside of God and find that it is empty, futile and meaningless.

So, so, so the arrival that, um, uh, Christianity promises. You're absolutely right. It is only part of the picture.

It's like the gravity. Mm-hmm. Gravity is real. The arrival is real. Um, but, um, there's another part of Christianity too.

Mm-hmm. Yeah. And that's the failure. The failure. The failure. The failure on the cross. Hmm.

What do you mean by Christ's failure on the cross?

So, he failed to bring the kingdom of God on the cross. People went away disappointed. Instead of arriving, they had a setback.

[25:07] And I think when he rose again, he corrected their misconception of what that arrival was meant to be. Yes. Okay. Yes.

So, the problem was still with people. You could still say sin corrupts even our understanding of what that arrival is. Um, and we will actually get to that in what then do we do.

But I'm wondering if there are any other questions around. Are there experiences of how you've seen or in some way experienced the futility and brokenness of work? I'm sorry. Yes.

Talking so much today. Especially when I don't have the voice to do it. Yeah, I experienced a lot of brokenness at work. I'm not going to go into a long story.

Um, but it was an extraordinary week for brokenness for me. Hmm. I'm sorry to hear that. Yeah. Work is broken.

[26:02] I think we are not immune to the effects and the impact of this brokenness of work. Um, so what then do we do?

Um, do we pack up our bags and go, I mean, where will we go, right? How can we hope then to experience God's good design for work in the face of these different ways in which it has been broken by the consequences of sin?

Um, I think there are some ideas. We have some ideas. Uh, and then after that, I would love to hear if you guys have more, but there are three ideas that I wanted to share. Um, first is to adjust our expectations for work on this side of eternity.

Um, so my small group, uh, in my small group, we're currently studying, wrapping up the study of first Corinthians and one defining characteristic of that body of believers was something that we have described as an over-realized eschatology, which was the belief that they were enjoying or meant to be enjoying things that would only become true on the other side of eternity.

The brokenness of work will only be fully healed when Christ returns. Until then, we will experience some of the thorns and thistles that come at work. So we should not be surprised by them.

[27:20] And because some define frustration as the difference between expectation and reality, adjusting your expectations, of work could potentially help you manage the disappointments that follow better than you otherwise would expect.

Um, managing expectations will also keep you from an anxiety that Tim Keller describes that just because you cannot realize your highest aspirations in your current work does not mean you have chosen wrongly or that you need to keep searching for the perfect career or one devoid of frustration.

Even in the right location, even in the right location, you should expect that frustrations will come.

Uh, those who are pursuing graduate studies will be the first to tell you they get into their dream graduate program and then all of a sudden, Groundhog Day, there's a point where it just becomes like every day is the same.

You are consistently making false discoveries or going down dead ends. Um, I've heard people describe at the end of the fact that, you know, if I knew every experiment that would not work, I could get my PhD in three months.

There was a guy who told me that three months I would be done. But it took him six years because that is in some way the fruitlessness of the toil. The second is to learn to focus on the good that is still present in the work.

[28:47] Um, the corruption of sin does muddy God's design for work, but it does not eliminate it. And with God's help, we can learn to see and be grateful for it, even in the face of thorns.

And so maybe as a small exercise, if you go to the passage in Genesis three, even when God calls to judgment on work, can you see anything good even in that judgment?

Is there anything, if you look at the passage, I don't know if we have our Bibles in Genesis three from 17, I think, let me see, to maybe 20, 20 or so, when God pronounces the judgment.

Is there anything good that you can observe there? I can read it, don't worry.

Don't worry. So that like, uh, it says, uh, curses the ground because of you in pain, you shall eat it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles, you shall bring forth for you and you shall eat the plants of the field.

[29:50] By the sweat of your face, you shall eat bread till you return to the ground for out of it. You were taken for you are dust and to dust you

shall return. What good could there possibly be in these verses that represent the curse of work?

Um, they would have days to their life.

Hmm. Instead of, in the day you eat there, uh, you shall die. Yeah. Mm-hmm. That's, that's one.

That's one. They didn't die immediately. Um, anyone else?

It's work related. They have ways to provide food. They, yes, there will still be food. Like, you know, I'm sure some of you are familiar with this, uh, with the myth of Sisyphus, who just kept rolling the hill up and then it, that their work, though it toiling and laborious, would still produce food for them to eat.

Uh, and so when they eat of that food, they can be thankful that it was not just going to be painful toil and then they die. There will be painful toil and then there will be food to eat.

[31:04] What else? There's only one slight one further in that passage. Well, they would return to the dust of the ground. Yeah.

When they were a part of the dust of the ground, there was no rebellion. Hmm. So they knew that there was coming a day when they would return there and again there would be no rebellion.

Hmm. I see that faintly. I can see that more clearly in the New Testament. Uh, but in their time it's like, you know, return to non-existence. Uh. Harder, but fair point, Richard.

Well, but you notice how I avoided the term non-existence? Yeah. Okay. Okay. Anyone else? There is one more. It's kind of hidden in there.

Yes. I don't know what you're getting at, but the idea that the curse is the ground for your sake, that God would think it's worth, like there's something more to do with us even though we've fallen.

[32:04] And so even if it's so sad that it's cursed for our sake, it's our fault. But also it's worth doing so that, um, because God needs something more to do with us.

Yeah. You will notice that God didn't curse the man. He cursed the ground. You know? Like it wasn't everything about him that was going to be cursed. Uh, even when it came to the, uh, even for the woman, it was just the pregnancy that was cursed.

It was not the woman that was cursed. Because there's actually an interesting, uh, study like there, there is another thing I, uh, called the, the gender job satisfaction paradox, which is that despite lower pay and even tougher conditions, women historically enjoy greater job satisfaction than men. It's, uh, I mean, I think they said it's like starting to erode, but it's actually been persistent enough that people studied it. And it's interesting that like, well, the woman's curse was not with regards to work.

So I, I thought I was very interesting that, you know, women can even still enjoy better job, job satisfaction. Now, of course, as we've studied, there'll probably be back and forth debates, but it is persistent enough that there have been articles and discussions about why is that so?

[33:18] And there are all sorts of reasons about what women see, can find it sometimes, what they find in work, that men maybe have trouble to do so. Um, so yes, there is good, even in that, and that we are a goal, we should learn to strive for that good.

Work may yield less than we anticipate, but it will yield something for which we can be thankful. In Ecclesiastes that we also looked at, even in his discussion of the futility of work, the teacher repeatedly comes back to this refrain.

There is nothing better for a man, for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also I saw is from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat or find enjoyment.

The fact that you can actually even after toil, take all the fruit of your labor and eat and enjoy it is a gift from God. So then in the seasons that we experience toil and frustration at work, one thing we can do is to reflect on what good has God given you in the midst of these frustrations that you experience.

You may have a difficult boss or you may have great colleagues. Um, you can be thankful for that. You could be, your work could compensate you in a way that allows you to be generous and provide for your needs.

[34:44] Um, even when it may feel like it is just drudgery work. Um, is it growth and skill development when the pay may be insufficient? You know?

Uh, and even for those who don't work for pay, or like for those of us who work at home, is it the joy of seeing your children grow even when they may be ungrateful? Or complain all the time, uh, that they don't get to eat ice cream for dinner.

Um, so yeah. Spending time reflecting on work and the ways, um, or I say you should spend time reflecting on your work and ways you can celebrate the good to the praise and glory of God. Because who can eat or find enjoyment like the writer of Ecclesiastes says, apart from him. Finally, and this is something that Richard had started mentioning that I would like we're going to come back to, is to keep the resurrection and eternity in view.

We will talk about this, um, later in the class when we come to the topic of how the gospel gives us a new perspective on work. But, as I mentioned earlier, um, again, we are studying the book of 1 Corinthians in my small group.

[35:55] And this week, uh, this past week we're looking at chapter 15, uh, where Paul was talking to them about the centrality of resurrection to the faith, to, to their faith, and the hope that was embedded in the fact that we will have resurrected bodies.

At the conclusion of this grand discourse, um, as an encouraging implication of what had gone beforehand in the previous chapter, in, in, in chapter in verses 1 to 2, 57.

Paul writes in 58. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

In other words, Paul is saying to them that the reality of the resurrection is a reminder that our labor is not in vain. And before we get tempted to dismiss that as pertaining only to spiritual labor, um, or direct kingdom work, you should remember, um, Alex's, uh, class from last week, uh, that reminds us that God's work extends beyond spiritual work to all labor that he's done in his glory.

That was a, actually a rallying cry of the reformation. Thus, even in the face of the fruitlessness and futility that sin has wrought on work, our work will not be in vain.

[37:13] But how can this be? Well, there is a clue in the earlier verses of the chapter, um, as Paul talks about the natural body and the resurrected body.

Um, in verse 42, he says, so it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable. What is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor.

It is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness. It is raised in power. It is sown a natural body. It is raised a spiritual body. In other words, there is this kind of seed to harvest like relationship between the natural and pre resurrection body and the post resurrection spiritual body.

And that may be the same with our work. What may seem insignificant, fruitless and pointless when done for the Lord on this side of eternity is realized in full harvest beyond our imagination post resurrection.

And the harvest of fruit dwarfs the seed in the same way that the glory of the resurrected body would dwarf the natural. And this is actually in fact how the story that I started telling earlier leaf by niggles, how it ends.

[38:31] Um, when niggles dies disappointed that all he was able to complete was one leaf of his magnificent vision. He arrives in heaven and Tolkien writes before him stood the tree, his tree finished its leaves opening its branches growing and bending in the wind that niggles had so often felt or guessed and yet had so often failed to catch.

That I think Richard is the arrival, the longing for arrival. The idea that there is, C.S. Lewis has said before, right? Like our hunger points us to the fact that there is something like food that satisfies. This arrival fallacy points us to the fact that there is an arrival. Uh, and an arrival for whose, whose fruitfulness and whose fulfillment of the labors for which we yearn will be greater than what we imagine.

But that arrival is only to be found in God. Um, so whatever we do, Paul reminds us, be steadfast knowing that the labor is not in vain.

Even when it feels fruitless, even if it feels pointless, Paul is saying in the Lord, it is not in vain. For God is able to bring forth a harvest here or in eternity as he so designed, as he so designed and, and so wills.

[39:52] So that should be our encouragement. Okay. I want to stop here. Are there other ways you think we can explore or manage this idea of, um,

you know, dealing with the brokenness of work in today's reality?

So perhaps I'm saying here, like, the same thing in a different way. But I just think that we are very poor judges of our own work. Mmm. Um, something can feel and seem fruitless, but many people are experiencing our work around this.

Mmm. And something that we could be very meaningful to them. And they don't necessarily express it, but God is really the only judge of our work.

Yeah. Yes, sir. I think work is just a subset of life itself, and we make too much of a difference. I don't think it's much different. There's no difference in the rest of our life.

Mmm. Yeah, but we do all the same terrible things in our real life as the work. Mmm. That's fair. I'm going to jump off of Susan's comment.

[41:03] Um, when I first started my business, um, I was looking at designing jewelry and having a line and being in different retailers and so forth and so on.

And when my daughter was diagnosed with autism, that shifted everything. And so I went back into the repair aspect. And for decades, I would pray, Lord, I feel like I'm in a dungeon in my studio and all I'm doing is repair work.

And this is not really where I wanted to go. This is not what I had seen. And a few years ago, he said to me, so, taking broken things and making them beautiful?

Yeah. Is this not something that you think is important to them? No. Well, how come it took all of these years to tell me that? Because it took all that time and you still hadn't figured it out.

I'm just pissed, what can I say? That's pretty beautiful. But that's, and, and, to your point, Susan, about, we don't know how important that piece of jewelry that I'm repairing is to whoever.

[42:24] And I've made wedding bands. And that, I find that so satisfying because those are really meaningful pieces. And it's beauty.

So, that's my experience. Anyone else? Well, you would get the same satisfaction if you weren't doing it for work. It's just all horrible.

Oh, I am so blessed that I get to have fun. I am so blessed that I get to have fun. But it doesn't have to be a work situation to get that satisfaction.

Maybe not wait for some reason. Mm-hmm. Oh, but, but wait. I, I said I had an extraordinarily broken experience at work this week. That's true.

But it was also fun. Oh, wow. The two were mixed together. Oh, wow. Yeah. There you go. I think John Hinkson in his class on cultivation in the previous series talked about it.

[43:25] That as Christians, we should be good cultural critics. Knowing that there is good allows us to, even in between, in the brokenness, we can locate and define the goodness that is in some of those things.

And that prevents us from falling into, in some way like, uh, Polianism or whatever. Polianerism, I would call it. Just over-optimism or deep cynicism. We can always identify where God is at work, even in the brokenness.

There was one more way, and this is building on what Susan said and Kim as well. Uh, I remember, I'm dating myself because I used to be on the internet a lot long, a lot, well, a different part of the internet a long time ago.

But, in the early 2000s, 2010s, there was this thing on Facebook called Humans of New York, which was like a really big thing. This guy would, you know, talk to random people in New York. And he became so famous, I think he was actually invited to the White House. And actually, there was a particular one where he spoke to the president at the time, I think it was Barack Obama. And he said, you know, and I think he asked him how, the question was, how does he manage, uh, in the midst of the frustration that politics and all of these, like, bring to his work.

[44:43] And he said, you know, sometimes, uh, and I'm paraphrasing because it's been a long time. But, I think he said something like, you know, it's easy to get frustrated when you think about, when he thinks about it in terms of what it does to him and his agenda.

But, when he focuses on the work itself, and the meaning that the work can have on the lives of other people, he can draw a lot more value from that.

And I think sometimes, that's like a, to Susan's point, we are often poor judges of our work because sometimes we judge our work in its ability to drive our own agenda and our own ambition.

But when you pivot away from that, and to see those for whom, as Dorothy Sayers said, work is the, um, you know, is creative, uh, cultivation in the service of others.

When we focus or shift perspective to what it does in the life of others, we can draw, we can then, the goodness that God intended for the work is a lot clearer than when it is for our own selves.

[45:46] Um, this tendency to look at our own selves and away from others is actually another way work is broken. And that is something that we will again pick up in the next class.

But, uh, I think it's 10 minutes to 10. It's a good time to stop. So, let me pray for us. Lord, we thank you, uh, because, as that song says, um, he comes to make his blessings known far as the curse is found.

Lord, that one day you will come and make all of these things new and beautiful yet again. But thank you that even in the midst of the brokenness, as Kim reminded us, you still make things beautiful.

Um, may you help us to see and experience that even in our work, looking to you and not the work in itself for our fulfillment and our joy. We ask in Jesus name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.