

Faith. Vocation. Culture.
The Washington Institute

Vocation Is Mission:
CREATION-Why Did God Make Us, or Anything?
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Autumn Series
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The following is transcribed from Part 1 of the Autumn "Vocation Is Mission" lecture series delivered in the Historic Church of The Falls Church on Wednesday, September 28, 2011

Good evening everybody. It is really good to be together. Let us pray together the words of the Scripture though David from Psalm 8. The same Lord who heard this when it was written is the same Lord who hears us tonight:

Psalm 8

- 1** O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
- 2** Out of the mouth of babies and infants,
you have established strength because of your foes,
to still the enemy and the avenger.
- 3** When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
- 4** what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?
- 5** Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
- 6** You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet,
- 7** all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
- 8** the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
- 9** O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Let's say that together. "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" Amen. Glory to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.

So, David is reflecting on the majesty of creation. And by virtue of reflecting on the majesty of creation, he is reflecting on the majesty of God, and he affirms at least three things from Genesis 1 and 2, with which he probably would have been quite familiar. He is affirming the dignity of man, and he is affirming the work of man. And of course, when I say "man," I mean humankind; I mean men and women—all of us.

So the first thing David affirms in Psalm 8 is that humans are just a little bit lower than the angels. We can see that in verse 5. They are above all other created beings, but they are just a little bit lower than the angels. But then secondly, he affirms that humankind—men and women—has been given dominion over all creation. That is, we have been put in charge. We have been given responsibility. We can see that in verses 6-8.

THE DIGNITY OF WORK

How many of you have ever been down on the mall in Washington D.C. or around the tidal basin when either the sun is rising or it is setting, and it is just gorgeous? Many of us have had that experience where we walk around in the beauty of this city—maybe the cherry blossoms are in bloom, maybe we see the monuments lit up in the pink light of sunset, whatever it is—and we look at the mall in Washington D.C. and all the monuments, and we think, "My goodness, this is just gorgeous! This is beautiful! I am so glad to be here right now!"

How many of you have ever been to Israel? A few of us have. You know what the most important fruit export from Israel is? Anybody remember? The one that I know about is oranges. Oranges from Haifa are famous. Now what's amazing about that? Israel is a desert, and yet in the mid 1800's, the Arabs figured out a way to irrigate it and grow oranges, and when the Israelis took over much of that land in the 1940's, they actually made it one of their major exports. Oranges from the desert. Now, the remarkable thing about this is that D.C. is built on a swamp. And as we just mentioned, in Israel, the oranges are coming from what was sand. It takes a lot of water to grow an orange, doesn't it?

And we have all been to places like this, right? Maybe not on such a large scale as a city or such a large scale as a country, but we all have been to places where we are there in the midst of something that man has made that enables us to fully appreciate creation, but also is made in such a way that it appreciates the people who built it for our enjoyment—for our pleasure. And there are many, many, many of these places on much smaller scales. They are all over the world. They are all over the city. They are all over our town. Probably you have made places in your own house or where you live that are just like this. You have taken something and you have made it into a place that gives you and anybody who comes into it a sense of deep peace, a sense of appreciation, a sense of recognition that "Oh, this is beautiful. This is good. I'm glad to be here. My soul feels nourished."

And friends, these things don't just happen, right? Rudyard Kipling, in a little couplet of his which I love, says this:

Our England is a garden, and such gardens are not made
By singing—'O, how beautiful!'—and sitting in the shade.

Get his point? Man is a mighty creature. Human kind is a mighty creation. We have worked hard to subdue the Earth.

Now where I live in the Shenandoah Valley is a place called Corhaven. I think about what this little 17 acres was 200 years ago. You know what it was? Forrest. Deep, thick, dense, forest. And yet, at some point, somebody came along and carved out the six cleared acres that we live on, they made it habitable, and they put a house on it. The other 11 acres of our property is a bit of forest that probably hasn't been touched in 80, 90, maybe even 100 years. And what do you think it looks like? What color is it? Very green...very green. It has been completely overgrown.

When we bought it, what we purchased was 11 acres of an overgrown forest that was literally unnavigable. Yet over the past couple of years, we have worked hard to put in trails and put in benches by the creek and put in statues that would remind people of Jesus specifically so that people can walk in these woods and encounter God somehow and find peace. And keeping those trails maintained

reminds me of just how much work it takes to maintain creation, to take care of whatever it is that God has put in one's trust.

In creating and in maintaining it that way, there is a deep, deep sense of *shalom*—this little haven in the woods in the Shenandoah Valley. *Shalom* for my family, but also because we offer it for retreats, *shalom* for others who come out like somebody did this morning and left this afternoon, people who come out simply to encounter God in that space we have created. And it gives me a deep sense that I am personally taking care of God's earth, using the Earth for God's purposes, and then in return being blessed by the Earth.

So these are the first two points from Genesis 1 and 2 on which David is reflecting in Psalm 8, that man has dignity, he is a little bit lower than the angels, but then secondly, man also has been given care over the Earth, dominion over the earth, charge over the earth. But here is the third point on which David in his Psalm is reflecting on Genesis 1 and 2. David gets the point, and this is it: It's about God. It's actually about God! Where does this Psalm begin and end? Is it a hymn to the praise of man? No, it is a hymn to the praise of the Lord. "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is YOUR name in all the Earth." Look at what YOU have done. Look at what YOU created. Look at what YOU started. And look at who you created to take care of what you created. O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name." There is all this creation and then he concludes, "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name." Creation is actually about God!

So we say to the builder of Washington D.C., the architect, "Good job, Pierre L'Enfant!" and good job to the many builders who took a swamp and made it into this gorgeous city. Good job Arab and Jewish people who somehow figured out how to grow oranges in the dry desert. Good job Haleys and all who have helped the Haleys make Corhaven into what it is. But more importantly, good job God for making a being that can do this. And good job God for making a being who is called and responsible, who is dignified in the doing of this. "Thank you God for dignifying us by giving us this charge to take this big ball we call Earth and be good stewards of it so that people can know who You are and how much You love us. Good job, God!" right? "O LORD, my Lord, how majestic is your name in all of this earth."

I have given you a quote from a man named Terence Fretheim from a book called *Creation Untamed*. It is quoted in Ben Worthington's *Work*:

"Genesis does not present the creation as a finished product, wrapped up with a big red bow and handed over to the creations to keep it exactly as originally created. It is not a one-time production. Indeed for the creation to stay just as God originally created it would constitute a failure of the divine design. From God's perspective, the world needs work; development and change are what God intends for it, and God enlists human beings (and other creations) to that end. From another angle, God did not exhaust the divine creativity in the first week of the world; God continues to create and uses creatures in a vocation that involves the becoming of creation."

So, in Psalm 8 we see that because of his dominion over all things, the dignity of man is not exclusive to the glory of God, rather it reflects the glory of God. In Genesis 1 and 2 we see that the dignity of man is not exclusive to work, for work reflects God who worked. God made us to work because He is a working God, and our work is one of the main ways that God continues His work in the world—continues His process of creating through our work. In fact, I think it could be said it is the *main* way. It is the main way that God does His work in the world.

So, concerning prayer, Blaise Pascal ponders why we should pray when God can do anything regardless of whether we pray or not. Does God need our prayers in order to work? Is He so limited by our personal devotion? No. So then why pray? Pascal says this, "Prayer gives human beings the dignity of cause." Prayer gives human beings the dignity of cause, and the same can be said of work. Our work gives us the dignity of cause. Oh yes, oh yes! God could have made D.C. on a swamp with a word, couldn't He have? He could have put orange groves in Israel at the beginning of time. He could have taken 17 acres in the Shenandoah Valley and with a snap made it into a spiritual retreat place. But He didn't. He did not and He does not. He gives humans the world, He gives us the world, and He says, "Make something of it! Do something that cares for it. Do something that enables it to take care of the people that I have made to live on it." God says, "I'm calling you to myself, and I'm calling you to work. Now, here is your tool," and He gives us the globe.

ALL VOCATION IS SACRED

Our bold assertion at the Washington Institute is this, that Vocation is integral not incidental to the mission of God in the world. Now friends, do you realize how bold of a claim this is? Do you realize how controversial this is in some circles? This is a bold claim. It stands against hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years of the popular notion—and the practically powerful notion—that there is a difference between sacred and secular callings. And as misguided as this division between sacred and secular is, it is still pervasive, and it affects us all. It is an issue of underdeveloped anthropology and underdeveloped eschatology. Let me put that another way. This sacred/secular divide, which is artificial, thrives when we do not have a clear idea of why we were made and where we are going or what comes next. In other words, the notion that some work is more holy than other work thrives when we are not clear about our anthropology or eschatology.

There are many good men and women I have met who are very, very successful in their careers doing good work for good people for good money, but they have a lingering doubt as to whether or not they have missed their calling. What they mean is that they wonder whether or not they could have served God better by going into the "full-time ministry," and working for the church. Or, others assume that for those who work for a church, their calling is somehow more holy, their life is somehow more given over to God. Or they assume that somehow the person who is called into "full-time Christian ministry" or has the opportunity, or burden, of wearing a collar, is somehow more holy than the rest of us. Practically speaking, this is the playing out of this sacred/secular divide. Friends, this divide is not so. Believe me, I am not more holy than any of you. In fact, I am quite confident I am less holy than most of you, and certainly I would say my work is no more important than your own. But these misconceptions are manifestations of this so called sacred/secular divide, to the roots of which Martin Luther tried to put an ax. Here is his very famous quote:

"Priests and bishops are supposed to employ God's Word and the sacraments. That is their work and office....Each shoemaker, smith, farmer and the like has his own office and trade, and nevertheless all are equally consecrated priests and bishops. And each with his office,"

—Ought to provide evangelism? Pastoral care? No—

"And each with his office or work ought to provide aid and service to the others..."

Now that's a 16th century protestant. Here is a 20th century catholic bishop, Francis Van Thuan:

"[Saints] do not do anything extraordinary, they simply carry out their ordinary activities....The worker will become a saint in the workplace, the soldier will become a saint in the army, the patient will become a saint in the hospital, the student will become a saint through studies, the priest will become a saint through his ministry as a priest, and a public servant will become a saint in the government office. Every step on the road to holiness is a step of sacrifice in the performance of one's mission in life."

That is a great leveling insight, isn't it? John Stott as well:

"If we are Christians we must spend our lives in the service of God and Man. The only difference between us lies in the nature of the service we are called to render. Some are indeed called to be missionaries, evangelists, or pastors, and others to the great professions of law, education, medicine, and social sciences. But others are called to commerce, to industry and farming, to accountancy and banking, to local government or parliament, and to the mass media, while there are still others who find their vocation in home-making and parenthood without pursuing an independent career. In all these spheres, and many others besides, it is possible for Christians to interpret their life work Christianly, and to see it neither as a necessary evil, nor even as a useful place in which to evangelize or make money for evangelism, but as their Christian vocation, as the way Christ has called them to spend their lives in his service."

Do you hear that? Your work is not only the context for evangelism, it has more value than that. This is John Stott writing, framer of the Lausanne covenant.

"Further, a part of their calling will be to seek to maintain Christ's standards of justice, righteousness, honesty, human dignity, and compassion in a society which no longer accepts them."

These are strong words from voices across centuries which are saying, "Stop the madness! Quit thinking that your work is second rate if you do not get paid by a church or missions board." This sacred/secular divide in regard to our work keeps too many people from living joyfully in their work with the knowledge that what they are doing Monday through Friday matters as deeply to God as what they do on a Sunday morning.

So, we believe that our work in the world, rightly understood and practiced, is as important to God's work in the world as pastoring, as missionary work, as evangelism, as so called "full-time Christian ministry." This is our assertion at The Washington Institute, and this is bold. Many people would not agree. However, those numbers are diminishing and that is good news. The question though is why do we believe this? Why do we assert it? Why do we say it? Why do we so boldly say, "Your work matters to God?" And most importantly, does the scripture teach it?

Well, we believe that it does, and a lot of folks are talking about it. They are writing about it. They are excitedly discussing it. Many, many people now are discovering this. There are many books, several new ones each year, that are exploring the themes of the sacredness of work. There are many organizations, organizations at Princeton and Yale, the Theology of Work Project with the Cardus group, and of course the further efforts of The Washington Institute, and there are so, so many others which are giving a lot of attention to exploring this relatively unexplored area of vocation as mission. Mike Metzger who has thought a lot about this stuff, writes this, "According to one observer, there are over

1,000 faith and work ministries worldwide, and most are headquartered in the United States.” There is a lot of attention being given to these questions, and all of these voices are calling for, and arguing for, a better view of work, and more importantly, a Biblical view of work.

The effect is this, for all of us, and I tell you this from my experience of my own work, which is work: it changes, “I’ve *got* to go to work,” to, “I *get* to go to work.” You hear that difference? It changes “I’ve *got* to go to work,” to “I *get* to go to work.” When you drive to the office or take the Metro or get on your computer with the thought, “I *get* to do this?” believe me, the days fly.

So, to make sure there is a clear scriptural foundation for this challenging assertion and this beautiful explanation, we are exploring the biblical and theological justification for the assertion, “Vocation is mission.” We will be looking at what the bible has to say about our work and the mission of God through the classic lens of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation. So let’s spend some time looking at Creation. “Why did God create us, or anything?” is the question. And here is the reason: He created us to reveal Himself. He is good. He is beautiful He is wise. He is powerful. And most of all, He is love.

THE PURPOSES OF CREATION

Now, there are two huge words we could use to answer the question, “Why did God create us, or anything?” One word is “glory” and the other word is “love.” Very simply, the word “glory” is the manifestation of who God is—the manifestation of His character. God created to reveal Himself, and that translates into the world “glory.” Literally in the Hebrew it is heavy, it is dense, it has gravitas. It is rich, it is full. And in the essence of God’s glory, in the essence of His character, is love. So, God creates us, He creates everything to reveal Himself, to show us His glory, and at the heart of His glory is the fact that He is love. He creates to reveal Himself, to reveal His love.

So let’s look at Genesis 1 and 2. This is the primary text for our basis of the assertion that your work matters to God. We will move through this text more quickly than it deserves, but faithfully with the time we have tonight. All manner of problems have been created in the 20th century by trying to make this passage something that it is not. In the process, so much of what it is has been completely lost. What a travesty; what a tragedy! Genesis 1 and 2 is not a scientific text book. It was not written to be that; it was not intended to be that. Genesis 1 and 2 and 3 are not so much about the “How” of Creation, but rather about the “Who” and about the “Why” of Creation. Tragically for the better part of about a hundred years, fights over the “How” of Creation have obscured the “Who” and the “Why.” Lord have mercy! So, let’s not be too concerned about the “How;” let’s think about the “Who” and the “Why.”

A couple of big points from this passage:

First, God in this passage, *Elohim*, existed before creation did. This is a big point in these narratives. Second, God was the creator of the world. There *was* one. And He is it. Third, Creation happened according to an orderly design over which God had control. Another important point out of this, fourth, God’s Word is powerful and can create. Another very important point from these passages, fifth, God blessed all that God created. And the last major point to take away from Genesis 1 and 2, sixth, Human beings are the pinnacle of Creation.

You see this last point in the literal words, you also see it in the syntax, and you even see it in the genre. It is prose, prose, prose, prose, prose, and then all of a sudden in Genesis 1:26 and 27 it turns into poetry. It is usually reflected in your text, and it moves from command, "let there be" to actually conversation between the Godhead. There is a dramatic insertion of a poem saying the same thing three times, that God created people in His image. Then after man and woman are on the earth, He looks over all and He says, "Now it is very good."

CREATION REVEALS GOD'S CHARACTER

So God's purposes in Creation. Firstly, God created the earth to reveal His character and to create a place where His character could be revealed. It is that simple. God created everything to reveal His character. He created the earth to create a place where His character could be revealed. And then, secondly, God creates people to inhabit it, people who are created to reveal God's self, people who are created to take care of what He has made, to steward His creation, and God creates people to be in relationship with Him. Did God create because he was lonely? No. God created because He was *full*. So, let's look at the major ways God reveals Himself through creation. There are a lot of main areas here, and we want to focus on the works, so I am going to rip through some of these early ones, just to say, I do not want to do an injustice to the other purposes of God in creation in an effort to make an argument for the purposes of God in giving us work to do. So we do want to note them, but we want to run through them rather quickly.

So, the purpose of Creation first and foremost is the revelation of God through Creation. Genesis 1:1, God created. The apostle Paul in Romans 9 later on explains for us very explicitly that a lot can be known about God through creation. In Romans 1:19-20, what can be known about God is plain because He has shone it. His invisible attributes, His power, and His divine nature have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world and the things that had been made. In other words, you can know a lot about God by looking at creation, and each of us has a story about this don't we? How many people here have understood something about God through something that man had nothing to do with? I bet every one of us.

For me it was an important step along the way in my coming to know that there was a God and who that God was. At age 17 it was standing on the frozen shores of Lake Michigan in January in Chicago and going out to the edge of the ice and realizing that the ice wasn't simply level with the water, but that there was actually a ten foot drop into the water, and in that water were these gigantic ice flows the size of cars, bouncing up and down in the waves. And as I looked over the edge three inches from falling over, I thought, "You know Bill, if you fall in right now, you are dead! You are *small*; something is *big* that made this." The sense of God's power, the sense of God's massive, omnipotence.

Now for all that we can learn about God though nature, we actually learn a lot more about God through people. Mike Mason wrote a wonderful book called *The Mystery of Marriage*, and in it he offers a wonderful insight. He says:

"If man really is fashioned, more than anything else, in the image of God, then clearly it follows that there is nothing on earth so near to God as a human being. The conclusion is inescapable, that to be in the presence of even the meanest, lowest, most repulsive specimen of humanity in the world is still to be closer to God than when looking up into a starry sky or beautiful sunset. Certainly this is why there is nothing in the New Testament about beautiful sunsets."

Interesting, isn't it? Yes, the image of God most clearly reveals in man. We want to spend quite a bit of time on that. So let me just jump to the second one and then we'll jump to the third.

DIRECT RELATIONSHIP REVEALS GOD'S CHARACTER

So God reveals himself in three primary ways, through creation, secondly, through direct relationship with human beings. We see this in Genesis 2 and 3. God walks in the garden together with Adam and Eve where they have a direct, unmediated relationship with God. Jesus explicates this so well when He talks about being one with the Father even as He is one with the Father. Or we see this in the Pauline language of having communion with God. We see that one of the ways God reveals Himself is actually through direct relationship with us, unmediated. There are various ways He can do this, but this is one of the reasons He created everything and created people, so that He could have direct relationship with us, not necessarily mediated through creation or through people.

I am going to read Revelation 21 and you tell me what it sounds like. It is reflecting on the new heavens and the new earth, the New Jerusalem coming down out of the clouds:

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with Man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be them as their God.'"

What does that sound like? Sounds like incarnation; sounds like the Garden of Eden, doesn't it? The dwelling place of God is with men. He will dwell with them, they will be His people and God Himself will be with them as their God. It sounds *just like* the Garden of Eden. The big difference between Genesis 1 and Revelation 21 is that it starts in a garden but ends in a city. It ends in the greatest cultural artifact of man and the most complex context for human relationships—the city. The Garden of Eden to the New Jerusalem, by design.

HUMANKIND REVEALS GOD'S CHARACTER

So, why does God create us or create anything? He creates us and everything to reveal Himself, and He does this through creation, through direct relationship with humankind, and thirdly, through human beings. Genesis 1:26 through 27. Tom Nelson is going to release a book in a few months called *Work Matters*. This is what he writes:

"The Genesis writer wants us to grasp humankind's unique place in creation. We observe this uniqueness in two foundational ways. First, humans are designed by God to exercise proper dominion over creation which is a divinely delegated stewardship role. Secondly, humans are designed by God to be His image bearers, to uniquely reflect who God is to His good world."

What we see here is an aspect of being—image bearers—and we see an aspect of doing—dominion over all creation. God reveals Himself through human beings, the image bearers. When you look at them, you say, "Oh, they are like and they act like the creator." They *are like* and they *act like* the creator.

Well, how do we reveal God? How do we reveal our creator? We have a spirit. We have certain capacities: we have reason, we have spirituality, we have conscience, we have self-awareness. This is

very, very significant: we have a will. We have freedom; we can choose. We are not governed by instinct—that is a big deal, which we are going to spend a lot more time with next time when we talk about the Fall.

So, we have a spirit. We have capacities. We image God in the relationship between a husband and a wife. We image God in the relationship between a husband and a wife resulting in children. This is all out of Ephesians 5:25. It is also out of Genesis 1:26-27. And then there is the trinity. This is classic reformed Trinitarian understanding that the Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father and the love between them is so intense that it generates a Spirit—another being. You have the love between a husband and a wife which is so intense that it creates another being. That is one of the ways we image God. But we image God not only in the relationship between husband and wife, but in our relationships with each other as well. *We* reveal God. God didn't create just one person; he created two people so they could have relationships, so their relationship could be marked by love—relationships centered on love and self giving of one to the other. We are created to love because God is love; it is that simple. The fact that God made more than one person demonstrates that.

And then another way God reveals His image in us, and this is very, very significant. So far we have been talking about the *being*; right now we are going to move towards the *doing*. He makes us to image Him in our divine function. We are co-creators with God, we are caretakers of what God has made, and we have been given dominion over all creation for just this purpose. So we work.

I love this from Richard Foster—actually I love it because it is Tolkien, but Foster reminds us of it:

“Work places us into the stream of divine action. We are ‘subcreators,’ as J. R. R. Tolkien reminds us. In saying this...I am referring to the sacredness of the work itself. As you and I care for our daily tasks, we are glorifying God in the work itself. When Martin Luther gave us his revolutionary teaching about the priesthood of all believers, he was referring not just to the fact that the plowboy and the milkmaid could do priestly or liturgical work, but that the plowing and the milking themselves were priestly work...”

To take this whole reflection on what the image of God is, in short, we look like God and we look after all that God has made. And we do this as an extension of the love of the One who is love. I encourage you at some point to read through—particularly the Gospel of Matthew is where this pops up a lot—any parable that Jesus is telling about the vineyard, or the field—God's field. Read through that and ask yourself, “What is the vineyard?” You will see some fun stuff.

Now let's focus on the divine function. Genesis 2:15 in the New International Version says, “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” In the English Standard, it says “to work it and to keep it.” In the Message, “God took the man and set him down in the Garden of Eden to work the ground and keep it in order.” Our original purpose is to work with and take care of God's creation, to work it, to turn it into a place of *shalom*—God's fullness lived out. What I love is that by virtue of this being in Genesis 2, not Genesis 3, what screams at you is that it is before the Fall. Our work is given to us before things got messed up. From Tom Nelson again:

“God could have placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and had everything done for them so they just sat around as food came to them, sipping their life-giving nutrients out of giant cups. This was not God's desire or His design for His good world. Because God Himself is a worker and because we are His image bearers, we were designed to reflect who God is in, through and by our work. The work we are

called to do each and every day, is an important part of our image bearing nature and stewardship. As human beings we were created to do things. In this sense we are not only human beings, we are also human doings. Being human means many things including being a worker. We have been created to contribute to God's world."

"Work" in Hebrew is the word *avodah* and what is wonderful about this word is depending on the context for where it is found, it can also be translated as "worship." Did you know that? The word in Hebrew for "work" and "worship" is the same. *Avodah*. In the lecture notes I include a quote from Dorothy Sayers which is wonderful. She reflects on what makes for Christian work, and she says it depends on whether or not it is good work. Of course, I am standing here wearing a collar. And all of you came home from your office. If you do your work as unto the Lord, and do it with more excellence than I do mine, your work is more worship than mine. Hear that? The way we worship with our work is to do it as good as we can, to the glory of God. Isn't that amazing? I am not the only full time minister here. I love this!

So God creates Adam and Eve. Two really big questions: One, did Adam and Eve have belly buttons? I don't know. That is a question that my four-year old asks. Here is the one that I ask, equally interesting, why are there no Jews in the garden? Why are there no Jews in the garden? Because *everybody* was to be God's people. That was the design. There didn't need to be a special people made to do God's work in the world. *Everybody* was to do God's work in the world. The Jews were created because of the failure of our first father and mother. Everyone was to image God fully, to reveal Him, to steward this creation, to relate with Him, to be like God, to display God, to act like God, indeed to be His presence, sharing His nature because of oneness with Him. Insert Jesus, insert Paul. We are in God, and God is in us, and together we are differentiated in partnership and harmony and love. That was the design.

Douglass Sherman puts this really well when he reminds us that everybody was to image God fully, and that meant that everybody was to work. Sherman says this:

"Put in general terms, the purpose of God's call is for the people of God to worship God, and to participate in God's creative and redemptive purposes for the world, to enjoy, hope for, pray for, and work towards God's shalom. This is what it means for Christians to be in Christ and to follow Christ."

Friends, when we work, we follow Jesus for even He worked. He says it all throughout John, particularly 5:17, "My Father is working until now, and I am working." Work is part of what it is to be divine.

CREATION AS SHALOM

So, swamp to a city. Deserts to orange groves. East coast forests to retreat houses. The world is your oyster, we are told. In light of what we have been talking about, what is wrong with the sentiment, "The world is your oyster?" What do you do with oysters? You eat them. It is awesome, right? The world is your oyster seems to say the world is yours to consume for your own gratification. No, no, no, the bible's picture is "The world is your canvas, the world is your construction site." Create with it. Make something beautiful with it. Make something for God with it. We are given the earth as a place to make for God's *shalom* that all people would know this God and know His *shalom*, that we would be one with Him even sharing in His very nature, which is 2 Peter 1.

In the lecture notes I have included a wonderful quote from Cornelius Plantinga on *shalom* where he is reflecting on the task of education. And I have also given you a wonderful quote from a guy named Nick Spencer in his article for *Tearfund* in the UK called "A Christian Vision for Human Flourishing." He says:

"In the Christian view, humans are created, material, dependent, interconnected beings. They are made to be creative, productive, responsible, generous,"

—here is a wonderful word—

"vice-regents of creation....To flourish as a human being means recognizing and respecting these dimensions: enabling all to have a meaningful say in the direction in which their lives travel; affording opportunities for all to be creative, productive and generous; ensuring that all share in the use of and care for our shared natural resources; making it possible for all to contribute to our common fellowship. The word in scripture that comes closest to capturing this idea is shalom."

Peace. Now this dynamic of people doing God's work on God's behalf for the sake of God's *shalom* in the world takes many forms. There are many things that are necessarily present in this society if it is going to create the context for the individuals within that society to have the possibility to flourish, to know God's *shalom*, to have the greatest possibility of each individual person knowing and living into God's dream for their own flourishing, His own design for them. There are certain things that are prerequisites for society so that this can happen for its individual people. And I would say that among these are basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, medical care, education, a just society, effective government, religious freedom, I would say the promulgation of the Christian gospel, the possibility of meaningful work, access to the arts, and freedom. No doubt there are others, but without any of these, it is going to be very difficult for a person to live into who God has made them to be. And it would seem that most work, one way or the other, can somehow be connected to the possibility of human flourishing by providing something along some of these lines, even if it is distant, even if you have to connect quite a few dots until you could figure out where your piece is.

Now some work absolutely does not contribute to human flourishing. It is true, and as believers we need to make sure that our work is contributing to human flourishing, contributing to *shalom*, and not detracting from it. It is very important, but thankfully examples of work that does not contribute to human flourishing are fewer in number than those that do.

So let's take one example, the example of having enough food to eat. If a person does not have enough food to eat, it is very hard for them to live into God's design for them. And yet, what is required to provide food for somebody to eat in a country like our own? Who helps get food on the table? Farmers, truckers, grocers, butchers, railroad workers, illegal farmer workers—absolutely, thank God for them!—policy makers—I am thinking of my friend who is the head of the faith based department at the United States Department of Agriculture trying to help hungry people get food. Yes, people who are involved in commodities exchange, scientists who are trying to figure out how to make more of it, people who are trying to figure out how to make more of it without it damaging the source from which it comes from. There are people who package it, people who try to provide food for those who do not have enough food, people who work at food banks. Who else? Cooks, moms, dads. Just talking like this, just thinking about one aspect of what is required for God's peace to be in the world, you realize it requires people to eat, and you say, "Oh my gosh, there are a lot of jobs in which there is an immense amount of dignity because this plays a small part in getting enough food on the table so that someone

else can flourish, so that someone else can live into God's design for them." I would imagine that each one of us here tonight can connect the dots to figure out how what you are doing actually is co-creation with God to enhance and enable and facilitate His *shalom* in the world for the sake of human flourishing so that we can reveal who He is, so that we can live into our original design. It is exciting, isn't it?

Now, before things get messed up, before we address the fact that the Fall happens, let me just insert this: anything contributing to God's *shalom* is somehow God's work, and we have the dignity of getting to do it. When God made human beings and put them responsibly in charge of His creation with a vision of *shalom* and universal flourishing, He meant it, and He patiently allows us to do our best even when we do our worst—even when we fail to live into the dignity of our calling and of our created purpose. And so it is a great grace indeed, indeed it is common grace. It is greater grace that God has not abandoned us to the implications of failing to live into our dignity. He has not abandoned us. And why He might have is the subject of our next lecture. So let me just say this as simply as I can: God works and as image bearers, we work. It is part of our dignity. It is part of our ministry, and it is part of our worship.

CREATION AND REST

Now, I would be failing you and not doing justice to the text if I did not mention one word in conclusion, and it is this word, "Sabbath." Sabbath. Not working for God's sake is as important in God's eyes as working well for God's sake. In fact, one could argue that God's command of Sabbath is clearer than His command to work. So, let's just remember that as we celebrate our opportunity to work on God's behalf, we need to remember that God Himself rested, that He took time and He sat back, and He enjoyed what He made. When we think about Sabbath, we think about stopping every now and then, reminding ourselves that while we are subcreators, we are not creators. We remind ourselves that to bring God's kingdom is only something that we help; it is not something that we complete. And we remind ourselves that there was a Messiah, and we are not Him. So we step back and take a definite period of time regularly and all we do is rest, and we do these things. We enjoy God, and we enjoy the gifts of God. We enjoy the creation of God. We enjoy especially the people of God, and by that I mean every person—the people whom God has given us the privilege of being in their presence because when we are in their presence, somehow, somehow, somehow we are actually in His presence as well. Amazing! What a way to live!