

# Cultivation and Service

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[ 0 : 00 ] Alright, so we are carrying on in our series on faith and work. Last time, last time Derek talked about work and it's meaning from Genesis one.

And one of the ways to talk about that that he did mention is that in the Middle Ages, and this has happened several times throughout church history, there's a distinction that's developed. And the rest is still around between work that matters to God and what's been called the mundane or the profane in earlier centuries.

And the work that matters to God in those ages and stages is ministry, the work of the priest, the work of the minister, the work of the nun in the late Middle Ages, whatever it may be.

The rest of it is profane. It's mundane work. Profane meaning not appointed to sacred ends, not appointed to sacred things. And the Reformation had a lot to say about work.

One of the big themes of the Reformation was about work. And Luther spent a lot of time recovering the goodness of work at every level. So Luther has all these famous quotes about it that you can Google and find really funny ones sometimes.

[ 1 : 13 ] But some of the helpful ones he says are things like, how does God love to exercise his providence in the world? And he says through the milkmaid and through the mason and through the soldier.

So he says, how does God protect the city? God is the refuge that protects the city. How? Because he puts a soldier who's been trained well on the city water protected at night. Work, that's good.

And God loves these things. So we saw last week that God in the beginning is a creator. God is a gardener. He makes the world, he cultivates, he gets his hands dirty.

He enters the garden, he calls human beings to work in the dirt. That work is good from the beginning. And so in the coming weeks, we're not going to do this tonight. I said we were going to get into the problems with work.

That'll be next time actually. But we're going to see the fact that, and this is a really helpful distinction to always have with you, that the structures of creation are good.

[ 2 : 08 ] And what's wrong is sin. That the problem with creation is not the creation. The problem with creation is not work. It's not being human.

It's not the family. It's not the institutions themselves. It is that sin has diseased and corrupted everything, including work.

And so the first thing we have to say is work is good. Okay, so let's have a focus tonight and dig down in that a little bit deeper and look at more precisely the ways in which God wants us to work. Why exactly is it good? Basically what precisely are we made for in relationship to work? So let me read just two short passages, Genesis 1, 26 to 28, and then we'll flip over to Genesis 2, verse 13. So 26 to 28, very famous, let us make man, God says, let us make man in our image. That's the Hebrew word man. That's Adam in Hebrew, which just means humans.

[ 3 : 13 ] It's not specifically talking about Adam by himself here. Let us make humans in our image after our likeness and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heaven and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. And God blessed them and God said, be fruitful, multiply, build the earth, subdue it, have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

All right, then jump down to chapter 2, verse 13. Sorry, verse 15. I meant to say the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to keep it.

Okay. All right. So how does work relate to who we are and what we're for? That's what we're asking tonight. And here we learn what we're for and we're for when you look at the big picture of Genesis 1 and 2, we're for living in the kingdom of God that God has made.

And that kingdom at the very beginning is on a mountain. Ezekiel 13 tells us that Eden is on a mountain, that it's a garden on a mountain and that this garden on top of a mountain is the coherence between heaven and earth.

[ 4 : 41 ] It's the union between heaven and earth. We learn in Ephesians chapter 1, verses 9 and 10 that the whole point of the Christian gospel is the union of heaven and earth.

And here we have it right at the beginning, that heaven and earth are united. God is condescended into this garden that he's made, Emmanuel. And that means that as all the Old Testament scholars tell us, Eden is meant to be understood as a temple.

So what we have here at the very beginning is a temple on top of a mountain and that temple is a garden. So the garden temple of God on top of the mountain, the mountain of God. A couple interesting points about this, when you dig into and study the temple itself, imagine the temple. It's full of garden imagery, garden images like plants and flowers were stitched into the canvases that made the tabernacle walls, right? The furniture itself, the menorah, the candle looks like the tree as a sign of the tree of life.

But beyond that, the shape of it. So in the temple, we have a square, right? And there's the outer court and then there's the inner court. And then inside the inner court, there is another square, a room.

[ 5 : 55 ] And in that room, there's the Holy of Holies. And in the center of that room is the Ark of the Covenant. Now if you pay attention to the way God constructs, instructs Adam and Eve and Eden, you realize Eden is bigger than the garden.

So it says there's Eden and then there's a garden within Eden. And inside that garden, it says there's a center and that center is the tree of life.

And you see the temple is mapped out on the basis of the Garden of Eden. There's the outer court, which is Eden itself, the inner court, which is the garden in the center, which is the tree, which is the outer court, inner court, and Holy of Holies, Ark of the Covenant.

The garden is the Holy of Holies, the Ark of the Covenant. And so God puts His first people, who's in this kingdom? It's people, right? And we learn Genesis 1, 26 to 28.

In this temple, the people are the image of God. They are different from the rest of the creation order. They are the Imago, the image of God. Okay, now what I want to focus on for a few minutes is these commands that God gives.

[ 7 : 00 ] He says to the image in the middle of this holy temple, take dominion over the land, subdue the land, be fruitful and multiply. He gives us these different commands.

What's dominion? Dominion is the command to be royal agents. In other words, he's saying dominion is royal language, it's sovereignty language.

So it's saying God is king of the world, and you are the vice regent, the little kings and queens of the world, the garden that I've put you in. So take dominion over the animals, over the land, you're to rule it, you're royal.

So there's sonship in that, there's inheritance language in that, there's command and power in that, it's royal. But then he also says subdue, and subdue is the command to work.

So he says take dominion, you have authority over the creation order, nature itself, and now subdue it, meaning work it. Subdue means to cultivate.

[ 8 : 02 ] So in the Latin translation of the Bible, the word there is used, the word that we get culture from to subdue to cultivate.

And so there's a command right there in the beginning that you have authority over the land, you have authority over nature and the things that have been made, and you are to work it. You're to subdue it, you're to cultivate it, you're to take power over it.

So multiple ways, one he says be fruitful and multiply. So you're to subdue it by building a society, by multiplying people, right, be fruitful and multiply.

You're to cultivate it into a garden we learn in Genesis 2 that it's their work to beautify it, to make it into a garden.

In other words, what's the difference in, what's a garden? A garden is what humans make out of wildernesses, right? So you have wildernesses and you have gardens.

[ 8 : 56 ] And gardens can be beautiful or more beautiful, but all a garden is is a cultivated wilderness, something that's been crafted by human hand, right? And so he's saying that your job is to be a crafter, a cultivator, a culture maker.

That means building society, building more people, creating more people and making this space into a garden, cultivating it. So you can imagine Adam and Eve, you know, maybe they're laying on their backs as the sun goes down in the Garden of Eden looking up at the stars.

And all of a sudden Eve starts to, for the first time in human history, I'm not going to try, but hum a little tune, something like, you know, twinkle, twinkle little star, maybe, because she's looking up at the stars and there it was, Adam said, I like that.

That is nice. These are the things that are happening. This is very selective text. We don't know what all happened, but these are the types of things that are happening. Music is being cultivated because they're gardeners.

And this idea of gardening, subduing, taking dominion is the command towards culture, towards cultivation at every level, which is just taking the raw materials that God has given you and making something of it, all the way to the point of ultimately making society.

[ 10 : 16 ] Okay, so that's one thing. What we learned, what we learned from that is that one work is prior to the fall.

And I want to suggest to you, I think the Bible wants us to think that work is everlasting. God does not cease to work when he enters Sabbath, not at all.

Sabbath for God is not a ceasing of his power, his exercise of power. It's a transition from creation to providence to preservation. But in the end of history, we have the same idea as being brought forward in the book of Revelation that we carry on the work of cultivation, that work is everlasting. It's never going to stop. It's never going to cease. Cultivation will never stop. Producing of crops will never cease. This is going to be the human work for all of eternity, for all of the everlasting life that we're going to have.

And that's because why? Because it is essential to what it means to be the image. And that's the big idea today, is that to work is essential to the concept of the image of God.

[ 11 : 21 ] If you're human, you're the image of God. And if you're the image of God, then you're made to work. It's essential. Derek was making that point last week, but we reiterate it here when we look at the image itself. God is a worker.

He makes us in his image. And it's essential to our being that we do the same, that we work the same, that we create culture. Secondly, 2, 15, then he puts them in the garden, he places them. By the way, that phrase there when it says, God took man, Adam, and put him in the garden is a planting verb. So it's saying that God even plants Adam in the garden and then makes him into the plant master, the gardener.

And it says he tells Adam, he tells the man to work and to keep. Now the second command we see from God, take dominion, subdued, be fruitful.

Chapter two, work and keep the garden. Okay, so you have the command to work there, but more substantially, these verbs show up in really significant ways across the first five books of the Bible.

[ 12 : 27 ] So on several occasions like Deuteronomy 4, work and keep are the verbs that are used typically for who? The priests.

So this is the same little couple of verbs that we see God use when he tells the priests to work and to keep the temple. Now there's no surprise in that because this is the temple.

And so it's not that Adam and Eve are receiving the verbs of the priesthood, it's that the priesthood are receiving the verbs of Adam and Eve, the first temple, the Garden of Eden, to work and to keep. So one scholar writes this, the Hebrew word of God can be translated as to work, to serve, or to worship.

It's the common verb used for cultivating the soil, but it's also commonly used in the religious sense of serving God and in all the priestly texts, especially regarding the tabernacle duties of the Levites. The second word to keep is Shamar, which is commonly used for the priestly service of worship as well as in legal texts observing religious commands.

[ 13 : 30 ] That means that the first to work is typically used in the rest of the five books to tell the priest how to protect the temple.

The second to keep is a word that is sometimes just simply translated in the context of worship commands. So he's very literally saying that your job in work is to worship and to guard, to worship

and protect, to worship and to work.

So cultivate the land, make a culture, build a society in this space, extend the population and the geography, work it, protect it, and worship, but that's what you're made for.

Worship God in his holy temple, be with God in his holy temple, and protect the temple. To make the temple beautiful, protect it at all costs, maintain that beauty, and worship all along the way at the very same time.

Those are the two central commands that humanity is given in the very beginning. So what were we made to do? We were made to worship and to work in the holy temple of God.

[14:50] That's what we see here at the very beginning. And those two things are completely integrated. In other words, let's put it this way, to give you some takeaways.

Humanity we today still are made to build God's world, the kingdom. This was Adam and Eve's command, in the beginning, into a space that honors God and honors particularly his presence. So when we work for the good in our lives today, as God defines it, as Christians, we do that. We seek to go out into the world and as Christians witness to the fact that we were made to build a space that is fit for God's presence.

It's impossible to ask on the one hand in this life, and nevertheless it still remains the command that we've been given. Their work in the beginning was what? Kick evil out.

Work and keep, meaning protect while you worship. And so their job was if any evil enters into this space, you've got to kick it out. And so as a worker, as a Christian worker, you are honoring the Amago dei in you.

[16:12] You are fulfilling your vocational call as a human. When you go to work and you kick evil out. So if you're a medical professional and you go every day and work till you drop, as I know you do, and you push back the chaos that is unhealth, that is disease, you are doing exactly what the image of God was made to do.

And you can think of a thousand other professions, how this works. The question in your profession, one of the first ways that you've got to ask, am I doing Christian, Christian work? The type of work that God made me for is simply one of the ways are you pushing evil back and bringing in the common good.

You are made to actually build a society that is fit for the condescension of the presence of God. To build a great city, you might say. And Christians have the power and ability to do that in a way that honors God in any sphere of life and any domain of life and any type of work capacity.

Now let me, we don't have too long left. When we come to faith in Jesus Christ and we're found in Christ, our salvation, our justification being found in Christ restores human beings to their original purpose.

So here's a little helpful phrase I think, grace, the grace of Jesus restores us to our nature. So when Jesus Christ comes and meets you and you're saved by him, what's happening?

[17:49] He is restoring you. That's what sanctification is, the process of restoring you to what a human really is, the image of God. Grace restores to nature, unto nature.

Grace restores us to be what we're supposed to be. And so when we come to a passage like Peter, 1 Peter 2, Peter says, let me define who the people of God are.

And what does he say? They are a royal priesthood because grace restores nature.

Grace brings you back to what you were meant to be. And in the beginning you were meant to be a dumb humanity was meant to be the royal sons and daughters of the king in his holy land and at the same time his priests who work, who cultivate a beautiful society, who kick any evil serpents that might come in, they knock them right out.

That was their job. That's what it means to be a royal priest. And Peter says, because you're in Christ, you are now a royal priest. You're a priesthood. You're a body of atoms and eaves all over again.

[19:04] Christ has restored you and is restoring you unto that great end, unto the original purpose for what you were made. And so that means our duty and work is to witness actually, this is the language of Acts 1, to witness to the coming kingdom of God in the way we work as if we were cultivating God's garden all over again.

Pushing back chaos, kicking the serpent out of the land. Now are we going to win that battle? On our own, absolutely not. So on the one hand, we can never do it. We can never build this kingdom.

We can never knock evil out of the park, not at all. But it's exactly the command we're given because it's a witness to the future where one day God will.

One day work will be fully restored. One day work will be good, tov, completely good again. So Christ saves us. Christ saves us.

Another way to say it would be this as we started to close. Christ saves us not from culture, but unto it. And that's a really important distinction for Christians.

[ 20 : 08 ] Christ does not save us from cultivation, which is all culture is. He saves us to it. He puts a humanity into the world so that they can be the preserving agent, salt.

He saves us to culture. He saves us for the life of the world, not to get away from the life of the world. And so that's because we in salvation are restored to what we were made to be the image of God.

All right, so let me give you just a few practical takeaways. I'm just going to list these off for us to get a little more specific here, a few little things.

First order of business. How does a Christian go then and do work well in the light of their maker and the light of being in the image of God? Number one, the way to serve God at work first is to do skillful, excellent work.

That is the first way to honor God. That's the first way to be the image of God. Right. You are the image of God. You're to be the image of God. It's both as an existential or sorry, essential reality and a command.

[ 21 : 14 ] First thing to do do excellent work. So you know, there's the famous line from, I think it's an every good endeavor. The other famous talk that he gave when he first launched that book.

How does a Christian be a Christian pilot? Some of you know the answer. What's his first, what's the first way that a Christian is a pilot and it's he lands the plane.

Nobody dies. And that's the way a Christian acts as a pilot. He just lands it. Right. And that's exactly the same for all of us.

That's the first order of business. Do skillful, excellent work. And finally, the way to serve God at work is then to have a vision to serve the common good.

So to do work in such a way that it matters for helping society, even in the smallest of ways. Right. So this can happen in all sorts of ways.

[ 22 : 10 ] One of the obvious things. So back to the medical professional, it's very obvious that every single medical professional can choose and is serving the common good as soon as they treat somebody that a lawyer can and does serve the common good when they exercise their profession in the right way by upholding the law, by seeking the good, by protecting the innocent and judging the guilt and seeking judgment for the guilty.

They're serving the common good. Right. The school teacher is doing amazing work to serve the common good, to build a great city, to build a great society. Right. Christianity tells us why Christianity tells us why we've got to get away from our individualism and serve the corporate and serve the common good that we were actually put in the world assault and light to build a great city. That's one of our commands. This is very clear in the book of Jeremiah in the Babylonian narratives. Right. What does God say through Jeremiah to the Israelites?

Do not go build your town, your enclave outside the walls of Babylon. No, seek the prosperity of the city. Seek the prosperity of every Babylonian, those pagans as they are.

Most of them hate you. Seek their good. Seek their peace. Seek their prosperity. Serve the common good. That is the Christian approach, the Christian way to doing work. Third, the way to serve God at work a little more acutely is to create beauty and to add to God's creation.

[ 23 : 32 ] So I was talking earlier today at ETS with some pastors who were doing the revitalization program about recovering the spiritual disciplines in the local church.

And one of the things we were talking about was recovering the spiritual discipline of something like, you can call it anything you want, but cultivation, the spiritual discipline of gardening, we could say very concretely, very literally, which is that it's been recognized throughout 2000 years of church history and beyond that is very important to create beauty in some way in the human life. And that's actually a discipline, a way of following our Lord, I think. So work, remember, we're defining work incredibly broadly. Work is not, you know, your employment, work is mothering and fathering, work is gardening, work is grocery shopping, work is any activity that's participating in cultivation, cultivation that feeds, cultivation that develops, you know, new words, the development

of language, that's cultivation, thinking is cultivation.

All of these things are culture making, right? One of the things I think we're called to do from Genesis 1 as the image bearers is have physical activity in our lives that's productive in some way. Whether that is planting flowers or painting or doing anything, fishing, I don't know, could be anything, but getting out in the world and getting our hands dirty a little bit.

[ 25 : 07 ] I mentioned last Sunday that every single rabbi, sorry, every single child in the first century, tier one of education is you memorize the Torah, okay, think about that.

Memorize the Torah word for word, they would chant it, they would sing it to memorize it, and learn a physical trade. Okay, if you didn't do those two things, you couldn't move on to the next tier of education.

That was childhood, that was Jesus, that's what Jesus would have done. You would have memorized the Torah as a boy and learned to be a handyman, a tecton, right? There's something in that, there's a spiritual discipline in that.

We're made to make beauty, and I think so that's the third. Fourth, fourth of six. The way to serve God at work is to do everything from the motivation to glorify God in a way that relativizes your boss.

So we'll get into this more next time, but if you don't like your boss, some of you don't like your boss, not me.

[ 26 : 11 ] But some of you don't like your boss, and it's very important for a Christian who's united to Jesus, who's reclaimed their status as developing into full humanity, emago de yin, all that it means vocationally to realize that your boss is incredibly relative when you have a Christian vision for work, that you work for the Lord, that you do your best for the Lord's sake, that you persevere in tough times because of God as your true boss.

You stand quorum deo before the face of the Lord at all times. He sees everything from top to bottom. You work for Him. You work for Him in your vocation. So as jerky as your boss may be, it's important that that gets addressed, but it's also important to see that it's relative because you work for the glory of God.

Fifth, the way to serve God at work is to work with a grateful, joyful, gospel-changed heart through all the ups and downs with virtue that's distinct in a way that your colleagues notice.

So a small step towards evangelism, I don't want to talk about evangelism at all today, but a small step is this. A Christian approach to work is to take the fruit of the spirit into the workplace.

Love, which is joy, peace, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, to work in a way where gossip no longer pervades your workspace.

[ 27 : 41 ] So first Timothy 4, a lot of people don't like this language, but I do. Can things be redeemed in this life? Absolutely they can. Paul says food can be sacrificed to idols dedicated to a pagan God, and then with prayer and thanksgiving you can bring it back again.

Bring it back to its creation purpose. Can work be redeemed? Absolutely. You can take a toxic work environment and bring it back to its creational purpose. You can take a broken legal office, a broken medical, a broken hospital, a broken school, and a Christian has the power by the Holy Spirit to work in such a way into that space where they bring it back to what?

Not bring it into the glorification, not make Jesus return, sanctify, no, instead what? Bring it back to its creation purposes. The purposes it's truly made for, to serve the common good.

The redemption of small things in life, and that's our calling. We do that I think in small ways by displaying the virtues, the virtues of Christ Himself. So not only following Jesus, but becoming like Him in the way we work.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness. Not seeking profit when we're around the table with the board members. Not seeking profit at every expense.

[ 29 : 02 ] Right? Not doing water, cooler, gossip. The drama of the workplace. Whatever it may be. These are little ways that a Christian enacts faithful work.

I want to mention too, maybe the last one, in the light of being the image of God and being renewed into that image, God does want every one of us to seek our God-given joys and passions to use your gifts in such a way that you're working for God's glory.

Right? So some of you, we'll talk more about this in the future, and this is the last thing. Some of you have found your vocational calling, and you're really satisfied in it.

And some of you haven't, and you're frustrated in that. And we'll get into the details of pastorally of how to deal with that, and probably two times from now.

But let me say that it is a calling in life, even when you're frustrated in the midst of your employment, to know that your work is much broader than your employment. And that God really has given you particular vocational gifts.

[ 30 : 08 ] That vocational gift might be the gift of mercy, the gift of generosity, the gift of counsel and encouragement, the gift of service, the gift of teaching.

Right? So you can be employed and at the same time also be seeking your vocational passions, your spiritual gifts, and exercising them in any domain of life. That is working to God's glory.

Work is so much bigger and broader than employment. And that's one of the many ways that we can do this. We've got to stop. Let me pray for us. Lord, we ask for help.

For frustrated workers tonight, help us to see the beauty of the call. For workers that are satisfied and appreciative and enjoying their work, Lord, we spur them on and give us all in both contexts a few things we ask for.

We ask that you would help us to see the relativity of our boss, that you would help us to see that we've been restored to our creation purposes and Christ made able to truly glorify you in the way we work, that we are royal and we're priestly, that we're in the world to cultivate, to keep, to guard, to protect, to push back the chaos, to witness to your great kingdom by kicking out the darkness ourselves.

[ 31 : 25 ] And finally, Lord, we ask that you would bring the kingdom to come. The space in which we will work and be satisfied, where the thorns and thistles will not push back against us, where it will be delightful work and never again labor.

And so we ask for that in Christ's name. God bless.