

**“Where’s God on a Monday?”
A Theology of Work
Genesis 1:1; 26 – 28; 2:1 – 2; 15**

By now for most of us the year has well and truly begun, the holidays have gone, interrupted by this thing called ‘work’.

For you, how do you think about work, how do you picture it – a necessary evil that pays the bills or something else?

More importantly, how does God see our work and what does the Bible say about employment?

The whole topic of work raises such a variety of emotions.

For some it is source of enjoyment.

For others there’s indifference.

And then others still (probably more than we realise), work is a source of deep frustration and even discouragement.

There are some people who have a sense that what they’re doing is making a real difference, while others are simply trying to get through another working day.

So this morning I want to embark on journey to explore over the next few weeks or so the question, “Where’s God on a Monday?”

Of which this morning is an introduction.

So here’s the thing, how do we define work?

Considering the space it takes up over a lifetime, how many of us have paused to reflect on what constitutes ‘work’?

So how would you define “work”?

That’s the first question to kick things off this morning.

I think when thinking about work, we often use this formula:

Work = Paid Employment

You mention work, and this is the first thing that comes to mind.

Part of the problem of course is the way our society shows how it values work. We do so through monetary remuneration.

But can we see the limitations to such a definition?

For example, what about people in their retirement?

Or students?

Study is often hard work.

Or what about parents who basically spend nearly every waking hour caring for their young children?

Or again, a parent who cares for an adult child who is some way disabled?

So Work = ~~Paid Employment~~

One better definition of work is provided by John Stott:

Work = purposeful activity, whether manual or mental, or both.

It encompasses the workplace, the home, the community and beyond. It is not solely identified with our careers or paid employment.

So when you or I talk about work, this is meaning that should come to mind.

So the next few weeks I want us to explore that area of life that takes up a significant portion of our lives.

I was challenged some years back that maybe the Church has been a bit slow in affirming the role of work in Christian lives.

Maybe our prayers don't reflect the place of work, our singing seldom mentions occupations, and the many churches make church meetings and programmes the absolute centre of the Christian life.

We are frequently left with questions like:

- are some forms of employment more valued by God than others?
- Are there some forms of work that though legal, are unethical to be involved in?
- What *do* we do when we find ourselves in an occupation that find increasingly soul crushing?
- And what about the Sabbath? Why Sabbath and what does it look like?

So as I said earlier this morning is an introduction. I don't intend to say everything that can be said or could be said.

So where do we begin?

God is a Worker

We begin with God.

Genesis chapter 1 and verse 1 – the very first verse of the Bible – states:

“In the beginning God... **made**... the heavens and the earth.”

And as we heard in reading of Genesis chapter 2:

“Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the **work** he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his **work**. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the **work** of creating that he had done.”

Three times God is described as having been at work.

And each time God is described as being at work, the Hebrew word used is the one that describes ordinary, everyday human work.

God is a worker.

Other ancient accounts of origins describe the beginning of the world as a battle between cosmic forces.

In Scripture however there is no struggle as God has no rivals.

Creation is not the aftermath of a battle but the plan of a craftsman.

In the very beginning, God went to work.

So think for a moment, and see how many images, found in Scripture,
that describe God involved in form of work.

Let's take a minute to do that.

Well how did we go?

So what kind of work did God do?

Here's some examples:

Well, He is an artist.

He created this amazing universe, with all its beauty and splendour. The Bible tells us, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”

Yet God is also an architect.

He has designed a galaxy and planet for us to live in.

The position of planet Earth is finely balanced. Any closer and we would be overheated, and any further away we would be frozen.

Like any good architect planet Earth is well planned.

God also did the work of a landscaper and gardener.

He shaped the earth into its wonderful forms. He cultivated an extraordinary array of plant life to enhance the look of the planet.

He's plants a garden as humanities first home.

You could also say that God is a biochemist.

He takes the elements of the earth and creates human beings. ¹

God is also builder.

He put the plan into action. He constructed the universe and Earth according to His design.

We should note that Jesus is referred as what in Mark's Gospel?

A carpenter.

In the Incarnation Jesus worked.

God is involved in purposeful activity (which is somewhat of an understatement in regard to God!)

If God works the work must be good.

God then goes one step further: He creates human beings in His image and commissions them to share in His work.

Genesis 1 verses 27 – 28:

"Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Genesis 2:15:

"The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to *work it* and *take care* of it."

God creates and then invites human beings into the creative process.

God creates us as co-creators.

In Genesis God plants the garden and then asks his image bearers to tend it.

All of this is what has come to be known as the Creation or Cultural Mandate.

¹ Genesis 2:7.

The material creation was made by God to be developed, cultivated and cared for in an endless number of ways through human labour.

A significant aspect of being created in God's image and likeness – what it means to be human – is to work, to be engaged in purposeful activity, whether manual or mental, or both.

As one commentator puts it:

“This stewardship role is a call for human beings to work *with* God using our abilities, time and possessions to further God's purposes.”²

The Genesis account of God's work and human inclusion in it tell us this: work is not some kind of necessary evil but in fact a good thing.

Work occurred before the inception of sin.

It occurred before the Fall.

Human work was fulfilling and it was good.

God by way of creation has imbued work with dignity, meaning and value.

Our experience of this has been tainted but God's creation mandate has never been rescinded.

Jesus affirmed this in his own labour as a carpenter

Work – A Necessary Evil?

Yet for many people work is a necessary evil.

When sin entered the world it distorted everything – our relationship with God and with others, and our relationship with creation.

Sin can cause us on one hand to abuse creation and dehumanise people or on the other idolise the created order and deify human beings.

Before sin's entrance into the world, work in the garden was without drudgery, without boredom, without mundane tasks and without painful toil.

But now human labour would result in times of “painful toil” and sweat (Genesis 3:17 – 19).

All and all, for many people work is a necessary evil.

² Alistair Mackenzie & Wayne Kirkland, *Where's God on a Monday* (Christchurch: NavPress, 2002), 14.

Even you absolutely love your work, there will be times of frustration and the challenge of the mundane.

Something else happened too in our thinking – dividing work (and large sections of our lives) into the ‘holy’ and the secular; creating a division between the spiritual world and the physical world.

So we speak of people in “full-time ministry” or people being involved in Christian mission.

What then about everyone else, those involved in the marketplace, wider community and homes?

In other words we can end up thinking that our day to day labours are a distraction and impediment to the “real stuff” of life.

Certainly that was my experience.

My first job was a part-time one when I was at high school.

It involved stocking shelves and packing bags at the checkout counter of a local supermarket.

It was a source of income but I didn’t think much more about it.

I thought of it as a bit of a side-show to the real stuff of life – church, youth group, evangelism, worship, Bible reading and prayer.

What’s interesting is that I wasn’t alone in that line of thought.

I’ve found through the years that often Christians struggle to integrate work with their faith.

They don’t see how God and this work stuff fit together.

What we need to do form and re-form our understanding of work.

As we form an understanding about our work in relation to our faith, we don’t begin with ourselves, or even our work.

The Good of Work

Jesus call to “Come, follow me” extends beyond Sunday mornings and out into every aspect of our daily comings and goings.

So what we can say it this: *your work in all the various forms, matters to God.*

It has significance (although at times it probably doesn’t feel like it).

Sir Christopher Wren is one of history’s great architects.

One of his great achievements was the construction of Saint Paul’s Cathedral in London.

Legend has it that one day, while the Cathedral was being built, Wren took a tour of the worksite and asked the various artisans about the labour. He approached one man who stated, "I'm ensuring that the walls are plumb." He spoke to another who replied, "I'm shaping the stonework". And another responded, "I'm attending to the foundations," As his tour was about to end Wren approached old man whose job was to stir cement with his shovel to keep it from hardening. Wren inquired, "And what are you doing sir." The man, not recognising that it was Christopher Wren, said proudly, "What I am I doing? Sir, I'm building a great cathedral!"

We can add one more feature to the definition of work.

Work is purposeful activity, whether manual or mental, or both, but it's not solely for our own benefit.

John Stott went on to enlarge the definition by saying that work is the expenditure of energy (manual or mental or both) *in the service of others, which brings fulfillment to the worker, benefit to the community, and glory to God.*"

Work is not something we do solely for ourselves and our selfish benefit

Our creation God's image bearers are a means by which we are made God's "co-workers".

God has created us and called us into achieving His good purposes.

Martin Luther, who ignited the Reformation, explained;

"Our parents and all authorities — in short, all people placed in the position of neighbors — have received the command to do us all kinds of good. So we receive our blessings not from them, but from God through them. Creatures are only the hands, channels, and means through which God bestows all blessings."

Luther also went on to write, "God milks His cows by those farmers He has assigned to the task."

When your work benefits others it is an expression of what is known as 'common grace'.

Common grace is the kindness and blessings of God expressed to all people whether they acknowledge Him or not.

One other good of work is this: in the hands of God our work both reveals and shapes our character.

The theological word is sanctification; training in godliness so that our character and lives reflect Christ's.

Now for some of us we may feel like we don't any real meaningful work in our lives. Can I make some suggestions?

- The work of prayer: praying for others in the many arenas of life including their paid employment.

- The work of encouragement: the kind enquiry about life including the workspaces that can be challenging.

- The work of well-timed wisdom: offering a thought in right time and way.

If human work finds its source in God and is esteemed, in what ways can we as a Church show that we value it too?

My hope is that this series will encourage us.

And I would to do something that accompanies this:

"Work ministry interviews."

These are questions we can use in small or home groups or even Sunday mornings:

- What is your main occupation?
- What are the issues you face in your daily life?
- What difference does your faith make to the way you address these issues?
- What have you learnt about God from a lifetime of work?
- How can we pray for you for your ministry in your place of work?

How would you answer these?

How does that sound? Any volunteers?

On that note, let's pray.