

Week 1 - The Origins of Calling

First Day:

INTRODUCTION:

Do we live to work or work to live?

What good does work bring to our lives?

Is work purely a means to an end, or does it carry intrinsic value and purpose?

To answer these important questions, we must determine the meaning of work and its connection to the larger Biblical notion of *calling*. This study begins with Creation. As we'll see, Genesis 1 sets forth that calling is first about knowing the Caller, not the call itself. Calling is not a job description or a gut feeling, it goes beyond occupation and integrates what we do (our purpose) with who we are (our identity).

In this passage, we are introduced to a God who declares purpose and identity over His creation – a God who, at the pinnacle moment of creation, forms humanity in his image. What this means is that He entrusts them to *continue* the work of creation; their calling is to be like their Creator.

Keep this emphasis in mind as you read the following passage.

Scripture: Genesis 1

¹In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ²The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

³And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶"And God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." ⁷And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were

above the expanse And it was so. ⁸And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together He called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

¹¹And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so. ¹²The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ¹³And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years., ¹⁵and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶And God made the two great lights -the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night – and the start. ¹⁷And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, ¹⁸to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.” ²¹So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²²And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” ²³And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds – livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. ²⁵And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” ²⁷So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

²⁸And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” ²⁹And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. ³⁰And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. ³¹And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What does the text reveal about the nature and character of God?

God’s voice/call has life-giving power.

God creates the universe and all that is in it through his Word. Each of the six days of creation in Genesis 1 begin with, “And God said,” Psalm 33:6 and 9 tells us, “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made... For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.” It is the direct speech of God that brings about every created thing; the Word “puts light in the midst of darkness, land in the midst of sea, air in the midst of water” More than this, the breath of God imbues a living spirit into Adam’s lifeless body. The voice of God, therefore, has a creative, life-giving power that brings structure and form to the earth.

But God not only spoke the world into being (Heb. 11:3, 2 Pet. 3:5), He also continues to speak directly to us in a way that is consistent with Genesis 1. God’s words to us bring structure and flourishing; without them, we feel lost and chaotic. The same power that created the entire universe, that

commanded Adam and Eve to live in the earth and steward all He had made, that voice still speaks order and direction into our broken world.

God is Creator; He is a working God.

The creation narrative in Genesis 1 presents us with a God who works. Genesis 2 continues to describe God at work as well; He sculpts human bodies from dust (Gen.2:7, 21), He plants a magnificent garden (Gen 2:8), and He cultivates an orchard of all kinds of beautiful and edible trees (Gen 2:9). Speaking may seem outside the accepted definition of “real” work, but God’s labor is much broader than we could ever imagine. Yes, God is Creator, but He is also “sustainer, preserver, provider, revealer, and lawgiver” – to mention only a few of His many other occupational hats. God not only works, but He does so in a multitude of ways.

God creates to make His glory known.

“The entire creation is intended to show God’s glory,” says Wayne Grudem. God was complete in Himself before He created the universe; He did not need, nor does He depend on humans or the moon or infinite stars in order to *have* glory. Creation was a totally free act determined by His sovereign will. Nonetheless, His aim, in and above all, is to display His majesty, and He created the universe to exhibit His glory.

We exist to know and glorify God, but we cannot see or feel Him with our bodily senses. We understand and experience Him – His omniscience, goodness, omnipotence, righteousness, love, etc.- through what He creates. Paul writes in Romans 1:20: “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made” (NIV). God creates to be glorified, and his glory is seen through what he makes.

2. In what ways are you discouraged, discontented, or disengaged at work?

Second Day: God - Creator (Genesis 1:26-27)

²⁶Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” ²⁷So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

1. What did we learn about our role and sense of identity in the world?

From “Every Good Endeavor” Pages 22-23

The book of Genesis leaves us with a striking truth – work was part of paradise. One biblical scholar summed it up: “It is perfectly clear that God’s good plan always included human beings working, or, more specifically, living in the constant cycle of work and rest.” Again, the contrast with other religions and cultures could not be sharper. Work did not come in after the golden age of leisure. It was part of God’s perfect design for human life, because we were made in God’s image, and part of His glory and happiness is that He works, as does the Son of God, who said, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working” (John 5:17).

The fact that God put work in paradise is startling to us because we so often think of work as a necessary evil or even punishment. Yet we do not see work brought into our human story after the fall of Adam, as part of the resulting brokenness and curse; it is part of the blessedness of the Garden of God. Work is as much a basic human need as food, beauty, rest, friendship, prayer, and sexuality; it is not simply medicine but food for our soul. Without meaningful work we sense significant inner loss and emptiness. People who are cut off from work because of physical or other reasons quickly discover how much they need work to thrive emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

2. How does seeing yourself as God’s image bearer shape the way you think about work?

Third Day: Humanity – Cultural Mandate (Genesis 1:28)

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

1. Do you tend to find the source of your identity in your work, or do you see your work as an expression of your identity?

From Every Good Endeavor” pages 36-37

Work has dignity because it is something that God does and because we do it in God’s place, as His representatives. We learn not only that work has dignity in itself, but also that all kinds of work have dignity. God’s own work in Genesis 1 and 2 is “manual” labor, as He shapes us out of the dust of the earth, deliberately putting a spirit in a physical body, and as He plants a garden. It is hard for us today to realize how revolutionary this idea has been in the history of human thinking. Minister and author Phillip Jensen puts it this way: “If God came into the world, what would He be like? For the ancient Greeks, he might have been a philosopher-king. The ancient Romans might have looked for a just and noble statesman. But how does the God of the Hebrews come into the world? As a carpenter.”

The current economic era has given us fresh impulses and new ways to stigmatize work such as farming and caring for children – jobs that supposedly are not “knowledge” jobs and therefore do not pay very well. But in Genesis we see God as a gardener, and in the New Testament we see Him as a carpenter. No task is too small a vessel to hold the immense dignity of work given by God. Simple physical labor is God’s work no less than the formulation of theological truth. Think of the supposedly menial work of housecleaning. Consider that if you do not do it – or hire someone else to do it – you will eventually get sick and die from the germs, viruses, and infections that will breed in your home. The material creation was made by God to be developed, cultivated, and cared for in an endless number of ways through

human labor. But even the simplest of these ways is important. Without them all, human life cannot flourish.

2. How does your work contribute to the common good, the well-being of others, and the improvement of the world?

Fourth Day: Humanity – the Fall (Genesis 3:6)

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

1. How does your work bring order and flourishing to your company or community?

From “Every Good Endeavor” Page 57

Christians should be aware of this revolutionary understanding of the purpose of their work in the world. We are not to choose jobs and conduct our work to fulfill ourselves and accrue power, for being called by God to do something is empowering enough. We are to see work as a way of service to God and our neighbor, and so we should both choose and conduct our work in accordance with that purpose. The question regarding our choice of work is no longer “What will make me the most money and give me the most status?” The question must now be, “How, with my existing abilities and opportunities, can I be of greatest service to other people, knowing what I do of God’s will and of human need?”

2. How might your sin affect your coworkers and even the quality of your work?

Fifth Day: Humanity – Image of God: Genesis 9:6

⁶Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; For in the image of God has God made mankind.

- 1. How does the truth of the gospel and the grace of God help you better represent God to those with whom you interact each day?**

From “The Faith and Work Bible”, Pages 19-20

The Bible has a lot to say about humanity. It tells us we were made male and female, that we are “fearfully and wonderfully made”, are frail, and we are sinful – the list goes on. Perhaps the most profound thing it says about humanity is that we all have been given the unfathomable honor of bearing the image of God. When we view another human being, we see God reflected in them. Even after the fall, despite the sin that resides in all people, humans continue to bear God’s image. And Christ – the perfect image of God came to redeem us so that we might reflect in greater fullness God’s glory.

As divine image bearers, we have a deep sense of purpose in this world, we are called to reflect God’s character and continue His work. This also shapes how we view and treat others. Each person – whether a stranger, neighbor or co-worker – must be given the dignity, respect and love due them as God’s image bearer.

To continue “Deeper in Truth” go to Page 19 of the Faith and Work Bible.

- 2. When you think of your coworkers, do you see them as people created in God’s divine image – worthy of dignity and value? Or do you see them as merely a means to your own personal gain, maybe even sometimes treating them as sub-human?**

Sixth Day: Humanity – Sabbath; Leviticus 23:3

³There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a day of sabbath rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a sabbath to the Lord.

1. How are you practicing Sabbath as part of your regular work rhythms?

From “The Faith and Work Bible”, Page 152-153

God commanded Israel to cease from work on the Sabbath to honor His commands to rest. Sadly, the Israelites failed time and again in keeping Sabbath, and as a result, they committed additional sins. Sabbath keeping is not merely a command but a necessary litmus test that reveals who or what we are ultimately trusting. So many of us often let work dictate our lives because we are tempted to believe – especially in our career-driven culture – that our work brings us our ultimate sense of identity, worth and security.

The ability to stop working in order to rest and honor God can only come from the confidence and peace that the gospel brings. We can rest only when we realize that in Christ, we are His co-heirs and children of God. Keeping Sabbath is far more than working one less day a week. It is a weekly realignment of our priorities and desires that helps us trust in God’s promise to provide for us. And when we rest in Christ, we make ourselves increasingly available to God to serve those around us.

To continue “Deeper in Truth” go to Page 152 of the Faith and Work Bible.

2. If you aren't practicing Sabbath, what are some ways you might begin to incorporate this practice into your life?