

Take your faith to work: Work is a blessing from God

Message for Sunday, September 14, 2014
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Genesis 1:1 – 2:15; Ephesians 6:7

Children's Message:

Every year, Jane plants a garden. Oh, I do some of the grunt work – digging up the soil to prepare it for planting. But Jane is the brains of the operation. We do it every spring, every year. Jane goes along, section by section, planting the seeds. Finally, it's all done.

Ha ha! That's supposed to be a joke, when I say "It's all done." Planting the seeds is only the start. From then on, it's a never-ending struggle to keep the weeds from taking over. And then watching the weather, seeing if the plants get enough rain. We have barrels under the down spout, to catch the water when it rains. So when we have a dry spell, I haul over buckets of water to give the thirsty plants a drink.

Yes, it's a lot of work to look after a garden. If we don't do it properly, the plants become weak and die.

God has given you something to look after. You have to look after it properly, or else it will die. *What is it?*

Right! Your body! You are responsible for looking after your body.

But there's more. Something else that God has given you to look after. Not just you alone, but all of us together. *The world!*

Genesis 1:28, New Living Translation:
Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground."

God has given us the job of looking after the world. Not just the land itself, but all the plants and animals.

Sermon: "Take your faith to work: Work is a blessing from God"

I once read this job description of a pastor:

- must have 30 years experience
- must be young and energetic
- must study the Bible deeply
- must spend hours carefully preparing sermons
- must spend most of the time out of the office

- must visit shut ins in the mornings, comfort the sick in the afternoons, and in the evening lead the groups for Bible study, youth, and fellowship. May go home for supper.
- must have a wonderful marriage and bring up children as angels; they must live happily as a family
- must be ready to leave them at a moment's notice when the phone rings.

What is your job description like?

- Clerk in a store where they regularly ask you to stay an extra half hour to finish some extra work, letting you know that if you object, there are other people who are eager for your job.
- Responsible for supervising the twenty people in your department, some of whom are outstanding, most of whom are pretty good, and a few who couldn't care less – but if they make mistakes, it's the phone on your desk that rings, and it's your ear the boss is shouting into.
- Retired from your old job, which means everyone assumes you have loads of free time to help with their project, and you're busier now than ever.
- Full-time Mom or Dad – except "full-time" means from 6:00 am until 11 pm, Monday to Sunday, no statutory holidays and no pay.

Of course, I'm painting a bleak picture of what work is like. But that is how many people in the world see work: drudgery that one has to endure in order to survive.

That is not what God teaches us in the Bible about work.

1) Work is blessed by God

First of all, God works. In fact, the first words in the Bible are about God working.

Genesis 1:1, New Living Translation:
In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

The book of Genesis pictures God working for six days, creating the universe, the galaxies with their stars and planets, including the one we call home.

Genesis 2:2, New Living Translation:
On the seventh day, having finished his task, God rested from all his work.

God worked. That means that work is pretty special.

2) Your work is a blessing from God

We are created in the image of God, which means that we have the capacity to work. We can take a block of wood and make it into a chair. We can take soil and seed and make it into food to feed the world. We can take time and patience and lots of love, and grow babies into mature members of society.

Some people think that work is a curse from God, the result of Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit.

Genesis 3:17, Today's English Version:

“Because of what you have done, the ground will be under a curse. You will have to work hard all your life to make it produce enough food for you.”

But these people are forgetting the earlier part of the creation story.

Genesis 2:8, 15, New International Version:

Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. . . .

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

In Genesis, God gave work to the man *before* there was any sin. Work was a blessing from God.

Work *is* a blessing from God, still today. In fact, although I have no way of knowing, I imagine there will be work for us to do in heaven. Cartoonists love to picture heaven with people sitting on clouds plucking at harps. I can't imagine spending eternity just sitting around. I won't be surprised if we still get to see the fruits of our labours in heaven. But back to here and now.

What is the difference between seeing work as drudgery and work as blessing? The difference is in the purpose. Work as drudgery is something you endure, in order to pay the bills. With that attitude, the purpose of work is just to survive, to get by. Work as blessing is something you receive as a gift, something to be cherished. With that attitude, the purpose of work is to partner with God in creating something wonderful.

3) Your work is God's work

Last week when I was talking about work, we focussed on Ephesians chapter 6. One of the verses we looked at was this one.

Ephesians 6:7, New Living Translation:

Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.

According to that, the purpose of work isn't for money or food or shelter. We work for God. Let me put that another way: whatever your work, you are doing God's work.

When you see work in that light, everything changes.

For Christians, life's primary vocation is ministry. Christians view their workplace as a

ministry post. Their pulpits are their desks, their cars, their classrooms, their kitchens. Seeing oneself as a mine worker, homemaker, school teacher, or professional person who happens to be a Christian is fundamentally different from seeing oneself primarily as a Christian who happens to be a secretary, salesperson, or accountant. - *T. R. McNeal*

Christopher Wren was the famous architect who helped rebuild England after it was devastated in the Great Fire of 1666. He was visiting one of his construction sites – St. Paul's Cathedral in London – and stopped to ask some workers how they were doing. He asked one, “What are you doing, sir?” His reply: “I'm laying bricks.” The second one replied, “I'm making a brick wall.” The third one stood back, raised his arms majestically, and said, “Can't you see, sir? I'm building a magnificent cathedral!”

All three were doing the same job. The first two likely saw it as menial labour. The third one found purpose and satisfaction in his work.

God has blessed work. In particular, God has blessed your work. Your work is God's work.

When we begin to see life through God's eyes, everything changes.

Next Steps:

- Think of your work as a gift from God, a blessing. *How does that change the way you approach your job?*
- Think of yourself as God's partner, and your work as God's work. *How does that change the way you value your work?*