

Scripture: Genesis 1:28-31; 2:8-15; Ephesians 6:5-9

Text: Genesis 2:15

Message: So Much Work to Do

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What is work? Why do you work?

There are as many different answers to that question as there are jobs. You may see work as only a means to gain an income. It is a pay cheque. It's something you do in order to pay the bills and buy your food.

Or you may consider work to be a necessity of life to endure a few days of the week. The focus of life is on the weekend when you don't have to go to work. Or life is geared to retirement, when you can quit working. The work week is really three days long: Monday, which drags into "Hump Day" which is endured until TGIF, Thank God It's Friday.

Some of you would agree with Oscar Wilde who said, "Work is the curse of the drinking class."

Perhaps you see work as a temporary stage in life, albeit a long temporary. You spend your younger years playing and going to school to prepare for a life of work. You work with the goal of escaping it someday when you retire, so the earlier you can retire, the better life will be.

Somehow there is the idea that we are to work for a while and then there comes a time when we quit working. You only have to listen to the mutual fund advertisements or ads from investment companies or the lottery and gaming commission. Make the big money and you can thumb your nose at the boss as you walk out the door. We live for the day when we won't have to work anymore.

In a lot of ways we allow work to define us. When we meet someone new we may ask for their name, but very early in the conversation will come the question, "And what do you do?" What is your area of work? That seems to be an important piece of information to know about someone. The work they do defines them. They might be a mere labourer or an important executive. They might have a position that is low on the ladder, which makes them ordinary, or an important position which supposedly makes them special.

There are others of you who will speak very highly of your work. You enjoy what you are doing and the challenges and opportunities which your work gives to you. There are

those who look up against retirement because it will mean giving up the regular activity of work which is enjoyed daily.

Work is often considered to be the result of the curse on Adam and Eve's disobedient sin in the garden of Eden. If we enjoy our work, it's only because we have been able to overcome the curse by God's grace. God's words to Adam speak of "painful toil" and "the sweat of your brow" as expressions of the difficulty and hardship of work. That certainly does not speak of pleasant enjoyment. Perhaps work *is* something we need to seek to escape.

Until we read the earlier verses in the creation story. Then we read that work was part of the original creation. Adam and Eve were placed in the garden and given authority over all of the creation to take care of it. It takes work to take care of animals and flowers and birds and trees. "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it."

There was no magic in Eden. Gardens cannot look after themselves; they are not self-perpetuating. Adam is placed there to work it and take care of it. The word translated as "work" is a Hebrew verb meaning "to serve." So the expression is given that Adam is placed in the garden as a servant. He is there not to *be served* but to *serve*.

The second verb, "take care" carries the nuance of "exercising great care over." There is even the implication that, if necessary, he will be guarding it. The same root is used in Genesis 3 to describe the angels who are on guard to prevent access to the tree of life. The garden is something to be *protected* more than it is something to be possessed.

Adam is placed in the garden to serve and protect the garden, not to gain and acquire more for himself. There are a couple of things to note here. Physical labour, work is not a consequence of sin. Work is not a curse. Work enters into the picture before sin does and if sin had not come into the world, we would still be working. Eden is certainly not a paradise in which Adam and Eve pass the time in idyllic and uninterrupted bliss, laying in a hammock with lemonade in hand, with absolutely no demands of their daily schedules. They had work to do.

We also see here that the work that is done is in service to God, to care for what he has made. This reminds us that "the earth is the Lord's and everything in it." This world, what we have and what we do is not our own. It is the Lord's and we are here to take care of it. We work with the parts of this creation, but that does not make it ours.

Adam was placed in the garden as a steward, taking care of what God had made. In

the same way, we must see the work we do as being stewards of what God has given us. We have been given skills to use. Some of us can design a building, others can construct it. Some of us work with pipes and wires, some work with animals and land, while still others work with ideas and people. Some of us can creatively prepare food and express wonderful hospitality, while others of us are great guests and eat well. We have different areas where we are responsible.

As we carry out our responsibility, as we do our work, we must realize that it is not done first of all for ourselves. This is not *my* job, *my* pay cheque, *my* income. As we confess in the Contemporary Testimony, “Our work is a calling from God.” Whatever work we do, wherever we find ourselves on the corporate ladder, we see that we are serving the Lord, not ourselves.

For those working, take that attitude with you to your workplace. Look around you at your job and see the Lord in that place. Carry out your task with diligence and integrity, for it is the Lord you are serving, not yourself or your boss.

For those who are retired, see your daily routines as serving the Lord, whatever work or activity you are involved in.

Does that seem a bit unrealistic? It’s one thing to worship on Sunday. Of course the Lord is here. And yes, the Lord is in our homes and our families and we can read the Bible and pray there. We can even see the Lord in creation around us as we take a walk or go for a drive. But the Lord at your workplace? Serving the Lord at your place of employment?

It’s the reality of this world in which we live. All that we are and have and do is part of the creation that God has made. God has placed us here to take care of *his* creation. Yes, we’re here to glorify God and we do that in working with God in this world. Our daily work is serving the Lord in our relationship with him.

That also challenges us to see our work in a positive way. We might not enjoy what we are doing for daily work, but it is not a curse. We might not be excited about a routine job, but our work is an opportunity to serve God. Also, we do not live to escape work, either on the weekend or in retirement.

The reading from Ephesians speaks to slaves and masters. Each one is encouraged to see their place as serving the Lord, whether as a slave working for a master, or a master in a place of authority. We carry out our responsibility with an attitude of serving the Lord.

Work is part of what God has made us to do. We can live each work day to the fullest,

even as we enjoy a day off and a weekend. Each day is lived with purpose for God.

This also puts the idea of retirement into a different perspective than what we may frequently hear around us. Retirement is not for ourselves. We may come to a stage or an age in life when we leave the active work force and retire from that particular field of work. But we never retire from serving the Lord. We never retire from working with God in this world. Your retirement years are not for yourself, but give you an opportunity to serve the Lord in different ways. You do not retire so that others can do the work for you. You continue to serve the Lord and others, but now in different ways.

The creation story also reminds us that we have a responsibility to care for this world in which we live. The Lord placed all things under our control. He placed Adam in the garden “to take care of it.” In our work, and in our lives, we must care for the Lord’s creation. This world is not ours to be used for our own benefit. It is to be cared for in a way that honours the Lord.

We are not concerned for the environment only so that our children and grandchildren will have a nice place to live. As Christians we support the efforts to reduce, reuse, recycle. We care for this world because it is the Lord’s. It is part of the work that the Lord has given us to do. Being given control over creation is not a permission to exploit it for our own advantage. It is to be responsible in caring for this world so that it continues to give glory to God, the creator. It is the work we do to restore this broken world to more and more reflect the glory of the Creator.

Today you have the opportunity to rest in God’s grace and be reminded of his providing care. It’s how the Lord intended us to live. Tomorrow you might have a holiday, which we call Labour Day. Celebrate the work which the Lord has given you, whether it is a daily job you go to or the opportunities you have to serve the Lord in your daily activities. Enjoy your work with the Lord.

Amen.