

Every Good Endeavor

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Genesis 1.26-2.3
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I. Connecting With One Another

What do you think of when someone says the word "work"? Your 9 to 5 career? Doing laundry? Mowing the lawn? Why do you think about what you do? Is there any kind of work you *enjoy* doing?

II. Introduction to this Series and Study

It's estimated that most of us will work somewhere around 100,000 hours in our lifetimes - and that doesn't include all the work in which we engage at home or church! This week we are embarking on a six-part series entitled Every Good Endeavor, in which we are seeking to uncover what the Bible (really) says about work.

We are beginning our series at the outset of the Hebrew Scriptures (well, not the *very* beginning, but you get the idea). While it might be tempting to start with what the Apostle Paul writes in the Epistles or what Jesus says in the gospels or even with the problem of sin in Genesis 3, to get the full story we need to start with God's work - and how our work was meant to both build upon and complement His work.

Doing so requires that we engage God's very nature: the Bible does not speak of the Divine as set apart from creation, but on the contrary, as One who purposely and lovingly fashions male and female in God's image. By engaging the very nature and creative drive of God, then, we are able to see the purpose of the work to which we are called.

III. Study the Text

- a. Even if you are familiar with the creation account of Genesis 1, read verses 1 through 25.

Pretend you're reading this passage for the first time: What do you find interesting? Surprising? What questions do you have?

- b. Other ancient accounts, such as the Babylonian epic *Enuma Elish*, depict the earth's creation as a result of warring cosmic forces, though Genesis 1 is quite different: God has no rivals, but instead intentionally creates all things, which are dependent upon Him for life.

Continue reading verses 26 through 31. Then, skimming through Genesis 1, notice the correlation between days 1 & 4, days 2 & 5, and days 3 & 6. Jot down what God creates each day, noting the connections:

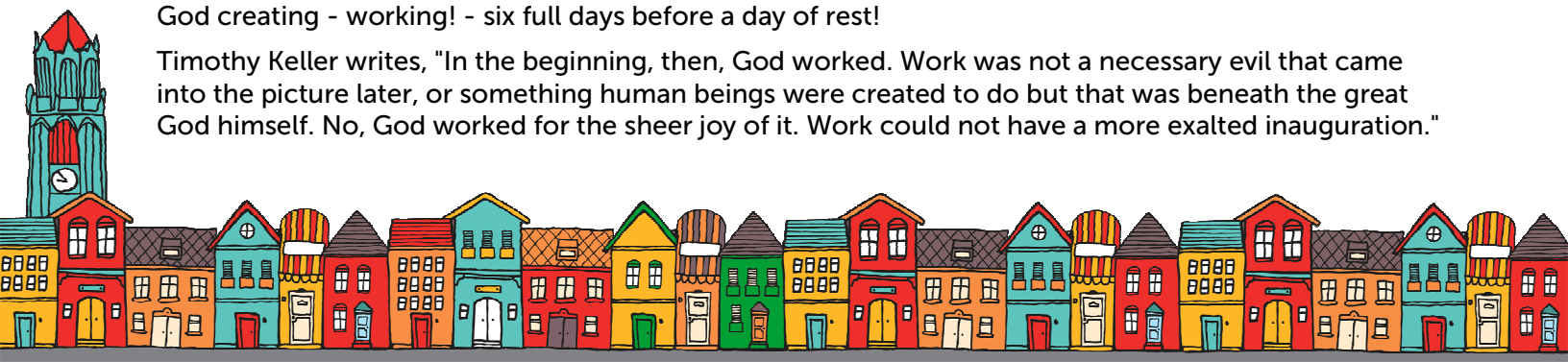
Day 1: Verses 3-5 _____ Day 4: Verses 14-19 _____

Day 2: Verses 6-8 _____ Day 5: Verses 20-23 _____

Day 3: Verses 9-13 _____ Day 6: Verses 24-31 _____

- c. Genesis differs from the Greek account of creation as well. The ancient poet Hesiod writes that in "the golden age" the pantheon of Greek gods and humanity lived together in harmony, and what's more, neither the gods nor humans did any work! On the contrary, notice that the Hebrew Scriptures depict God creating - working! - six full days before a day of rest!

Timothy Keller writes, "In the beginning, then, God worked. Work was not a necessary evil that came into the picture later, or something human beings were created to do but that was beneath the great God himself. No, God worked for the sheer joy of it. Work could not have a more exalted inauguration."



Which image of God, then, is more prevalent in 21st century American culture? The Greek pantheon of gods who view work as being beneath them - or the Hebrew God who is actively engaged, creating and working "for the sheer joy of it"? And how does that influence our culture's understanding of work?

- d. While we're thinking about two divergent *images* of God, reread verses 26 through 31. What does it mean to you to be created "in the image of God"?

Recall that throughout Genesis 1.1-25, God both creates and instructs the natural world to "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas." (verse 22) Compare and contrast God's instructions to the animal kingdom with God's instructions to the first humans in verse 28. What is the same? What is different? Why do you think God gives a *higher calling* to humanity? What connection do you see between God's calling for humans and God creating humanity in His image?

One scholar notes, "This chapter discloses man's true nature. He is the apex of the created order: the whole narrative moves toward the creation of man... While man shares with plants and animals the ability to reproduce himself, he alone is made in the divine image and is instructed to subdue the earth. The image of God means that in some sense men and women resemble God... The divine image does enable man to be addressed directly by his creator and makes him in a real sense God's representative on earth, who should rule over the other creatures as a benevolent king."

- e. It is important that we recognize that the Garden was not "perfect" - there was a wildness inherent in creation. This is why God calls humans - the crown of His creation - to join him in tilling and working the ground that provides their food! It's been written, "Paradise wasn't a vacation - it was a vocation."

Look at Genesis 1.28 in each Bible translation you have access to. Is the word "subdue" rendered differently in any versions? Do these other words give a different "sense" to the verse?

How have you heard others discuss this verse? What word did they use for "subdue"? How did that shape their understanding of being stewards of God's creation?

- f. Read Genesis 2.1-3. What does God resting on the seventh day mean for you?

Do you practice taking a Sabbath? If not, why not!? If it was good enough for God to rest, why not you? Perhaps that could be a New Year's resolution?

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. How has the Greek concept of labor influenced your thinking about work? Have you ever thought - or wished!? - that God's original intentions were *vacation* instead of *vocation*? How does reflecting upon God's nature as an engaged, creative worker inspire you in your work?
- b. Recall that God *calls* the first humans to care for the Garden. In fact, the term "vocation" comes from the Latin *vocare*, meaning "to call." Do you feel that you have been called to the work you are doing - or once did? If you don't feel called to the work specifically, how is God calling you to work within your work?
- c. What different "gardens" do you till and work in this phase of your life? How can you be encouraged to till and work them to the best of your ability?
- d. Spend some time meditating on being created in the image of God, thinking through all the ways that can shift your perspective on work. Try journaling them or talking them over with a friend.

V. Pray

- a. Lift up your fellow Christian co-workers, that they may grow to see their work - whatever it is - as "God's garden" created for their tilling and working,
- b. Pray for our children, students, advisors and staff who are away at Forest Home Christian Camps this weekend, that God would draw them unto Himself, helping them see that they too are created in His image and that He has a calling on their lives,
- c. Ask that by His Holy Spirit, God would use this study to transform our perspectives on work, that we would be encouraged and empowered to work diligently in the world for His glory.

