

Every Good Endeavor

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Isaiah 28.23-29
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I. Connecting With One Another

Have you ever been to an AYSO youth soccer game? Share you recollections with your group.

If you've been to a game, you have probably noticed the first of six distinctives of the league: "Everyone Plays." This emphasis requires that even some of the best players must sit out for part of the game so that some of the less talented child athletes have a chance to play as well. When I was growing up, some of my talented athletic friends hated the rule, while I rather appreciated it (if you get my drift!). Have you seen this desire for opportunity play out in any other aspects of life? How did it work out?

II. Introduction to this Study

This is week five of our six-week series Every Good Endeavor, in which we're engaging a biblical theology of vocation. We've seen that God created the world good and created humanity very good, in His image, and invited us – the crown of His creation – to join Him in cultivating and co-creating. And yet, we know the bad news as well: Humanity did not live up to this calling, and at our worst – as we saw last week – work can become selfish and reveal our idols, instead of bringing out the wonders of Creation and serving our neighbor, as it was intended to do.

This week we'll explore what it means that "Everyone Plays": That God continues to be in the business of bringing out the wonders of His created order by training all people – yes, *all* people – to do their very best in their respective fields. In order to do so, we'll address a theological perspective central to the Reformed tradition known as "Common Grace," which asserts that even after the Fall, God continues to use all people to till and work the Garden of this world, whether they know He is using them or not! As we will see, this is different from "Special Grace" or "Saving Grace," by which we come to recognize God as our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, and through which we are promised everlasting life.

III. Study the Text

- a. We have engaged God's work of creation, as well as His sewing of garments for Adam and Eve even after the Fall. And we know that Jesus was a carpenter and was described as the Good Shepherd. Without looking in your Bible, write down as many other biblical descriptions of God working that you can recall:

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

After you've racked your brain, look through your bible concordance or check out these passages, noting all the ways God is seen working: Exodus 32.15-16, Psalm 40.3, 80.1-3, 104.14-15, 127.1, Isaiah 64.8, 2nd Corinthians 5.1-5.

What is the modern day form of these vocations? Does God's work in any of these areas surprise you? Why – or why not?

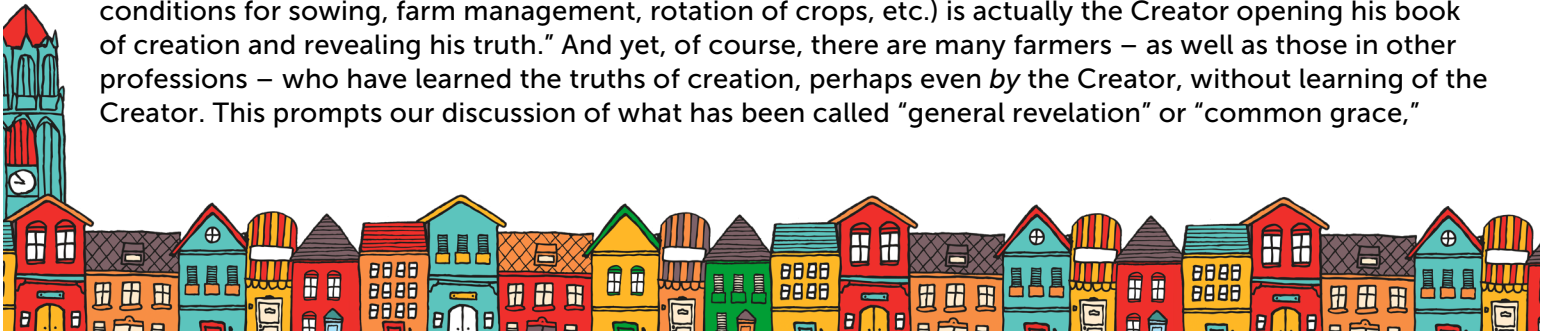
How does it transform your understanding of work knowing that God Himself engages in these vocations?

- b. Read Isaiah 28.23-29. What do you find interesting in this passage? Is anything confusing?
- c. While Isaiah is one of the Major Prophets (some have even referred to this book as "the fifth gospel" because of it's many references to the coming Messiah), this section is considered a parable of sorts. Recall that farming, or "tilling and working the ground," is used throughout Scripture as a metaphor for all culture making, since all good endeavors join in God's redemptive work in and on behalf of creation. It has been noted, "God's strategy for history, like his strategy for agriculture, is wonderful and achieves success."

Look back through Isaiah 28.23-29, in light of the many ways we saw God working above. How would God "instruct and teach the right way" in each of those vocations?

How about other seasons of life not addressed in the passages above (for instance: school, parenting, or for those retired)?

- d. Scholar Alec Motyer writes of Isaiah 28.23-29, "What appears as a discovery (the proper season and conditions for sowing, farm management, rotation of crops, etc.) is actually the Creator opening his book of creation and revealing his truth." And yet, of course, there are many farmers – as well as those in other professions – who have learned the truths of creation, perhaps even by the Creator, without learning of the Creator. This prompts our discussion of what has been called "general revelation" or "common grace,"



through which God restrains sin, His wrath against sin, and bestows blessings on humanity, including those who may even ultimately reject Him.

In order to engage this theological perspective, read these passages – noting their common themes: Psalm 24.1-2, Exodus 31.1-4, Isaiah 45.1-3, Matthew 5.43-45, Acts 14.16-18, Romans 1.18-20 and James 1.16-17.

How does this concept of “common grace” could help you understand your “tilling and working” alongside coworkers, family members and neighbors who may not share your faith in Jesus Christ?

We need to be clear that “common grace” does not refer to salvific grace, through which we come to know Jesus. Perhaps this is one reason Jesus constantly asked whether those who sought to follow Him had “eyes to see and ears to hear” the good news of *saving* grace? An interesting passage that engages both concepts of grace may be Acts 17.24-31 (note especially verses 25 and 30).

- e. It’s been said many times in many different ways that we cannot make sense of anything without attaching it to a story line. This is why it’s so frustrating for us when someone comes into a movie halfway through and wants to know exactly what’s going on! In fact, this importance of story has been the basis of a number of recent movies, two that come to mind: *Big Fish* and *Stranger Than Fiction* (if you’re looking for something to watch on Friday night!).

In the first week of this series we engaged this importance on God’s story by discussing the importance of a four-chapter gospel:

1) God’s Good Creation 2) Humanity’s Fall 3) Redemption Through Jesus 4) Restoration of All Things

As we saw, with just a two-chapter gospel – fall and redemption – spiritual kinds of work are more highly valued than others. With a four-chapter gospel, however, we see the importance of all the ways God calls us. As such, we recognize and celebrate God’s continual teaching of all kinds of work.

How do the theological concepts of “common grace” and “special grace” help you make sense of the above timeline?

How is God currently moving His story along? Do you think He uses non-believers to do so? If so, how are believers used differently than believers?

- f. Thinking about story helps us understand worldview. After all, a worldview is essentially a narrative that explains things – like how we understand life and how we are called to live. So, the more we are informed by God’s story, the more likely we will be to live into a Christian worldview.

One of the key passages that relates to Christian worldview is Romans 12.2: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

How does this help you understand your vocational life? In other words, how does Romans 12.2 help you understand what God has called you to?

- g. Let’s read Romans 12.2 again, but in context. Begin reading again at Romans 11.33, continuing on through Romans 12.8. How – if at all – does that alter your understanding of living into a Christian worldview? Notice that Paul engages a Christian worldview only after worship (11.33-36), discussing becoming “living sacrifices” (12.1), and follows it up by writing how different gifts build up the body of Christ (12.3-8).

How does this alter your understanding of vocation for followers of Jesus?

To (attempt to) bring this study full circle, how does the “many gifts” Paul discusses in Romans 12 help you understand God’s “teaching” in Isaiah 28.23-29?

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. Where are you called to serve in your day-to-day life? How has God taught you in your vocation? How could you be more open to His guidance in your life?
- b. We discussed above that “God’s strategy for history, like his strategy for agriculture, is wonderful and achieves success.” After all we’ve studied, how do you now understand “success” in this sentence?
- c. How does the concept of “common grace” transform how you think about sharing the good news of God’s salvation with those who have not yet decided to follow Jesus?
- d. What’s your life story? How has the Christian worldview helped shape that?
- e. How have the many gifts of the Christian community helped your journey of faith?

V. Pray

Spend some time in prayer:

- a. Lift up the many members in the community of Good Shepherd, asking that God would continue to train us in our many areas of calling, that we might do them to the best of our ability,
- b. Pray for this weekend’s gatherings, that God would draw us and new worshippers to join with us – and that God would use us to invite others into worship,
- c. Thank God for the many gifts through which He continues to build up His church, and pray that God would use Good Shepherd to help equip all people to serve in the name of Jesus.

