

Study 16. We love work

Big idea: our work matters to God

What was the first job you ever had?

Observation and interpretation

Read Genesis 1:24-2:2, 2:15 and 3:17-19

- In what ways is work “built in” to this creation account?

You might want to pick up three aspects:

1. God as a worker who creates the world, and rests from his work (Gen 2:2).
2. The world as a continual work in progress (Gen 1:24), i.e. God doesn't just create a full world but one which will itself produce more life.
3. The humans as image-bearers of this worker God, given authority to work on his behalf in the world (Gen 1:27-28).

- Is work presented as a negative or a positive part of human life (i.e. is it a consequence of sin or part of the good creation)?
- In what ways is our modern work affected by the fall?

Genesis 1:28 is sometimes called the “cultural mandate”. Here we are using “culture” in the broadest sense - “stuff that we do that means something”. Or, if you prefer a more technical definition:

“Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts” (A. L. Kroeber and C. Kluckhohn)

Agriculture is one of the most obvious forms of culture (culture/cultivate are the same idea). But so are other forms of work: architecture, dancing, sharing meals, raising capital, mechanical engineering - these are all culture.

The fall of culture is described in many places, but particularly Genesis 11:3-4. The redemption of culture is described in Isaiah 61 and 66, and Revelation 22:2.

Read Colossians 3:22 - 4:1

- How does Paul want slaves to change the way they think about work?

The idea of slavery may at first seem foreign (and reprehensible!) to us. If you can, try to leave the question of the ethics of slavery aside for a moment (the Bible is not pro-slavery, in fact both New and Old Testaments condemn the injustices inherent in the system: Deut 24:7, 1 Tim 1:10). But in that world slavery was an economic reality even for the most skilled workers such as teachers or civil servants (there were no online job advertisements or recruiting firms yet), and indeed many slaves entered into service voluntarily, for a defined period, in exchange for pay. This starts to sound a lot like the situation of salaried workers today, at least in the sense that we have to work for someone who isn't us!

Read Exodus 20:8-11

- This is law for ancient Israel and not for Christians. But what principles are still relevant to us today? (You might also look at Leviticus 25:4)

Implications

How does the fact that we are made in the “image of God” (Genesis 1:27, see study 3) affect how we think of work?

For an interesting article on the connection between God the worker and us as workers see <http://marketplaceinstitute.org/2015/03/why-work/>.

How might the gospel change the way each of these different types of worker thinks about their work?

- A plumber
- A lawyer
- A student
- A full time carer / parent

The reformer Martin Luther famously restored dignity to secular vocations, pointing out that to change nappies or farm the land are as much God’s work as to be a priest. God in his providence feeds the hungry and provides security (Psalm 147:14), and so the farmer who tends those crops is participating in God’s work. In our modern world where our jobs are so specialised, it can take a little thinking to see how this connects, but the principle still holds. For instance, a lawyer who drafts agreements helps create a system where things can be bought and sold without fear of being ripped off. This contributes both to our security and our food, which is God’s work. For more in this see Tim Keller’s *Center Church*, (ch 16) and *Every Good Endeavour*.

Does the *quality* of our work matter to God?

“Our greatest fear as individuals and as a church should not be of failure but of succeeding at things in life that don’t really matter.” (Tim Kizziar, cited in Matt Perman, *What’s Best Next*.)

“God created me - and you - to live with a single, all-embracingly, all-transforming passion - namely, a passion to glorify God by enjoying and displaying his supreme excellence in all spheres of life.” (John Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life*)

Prayer ideas

Maybe go around the group praying for each worker and their workplace. See if you can begin each prayer with a reminder of the character of God and how that person’s particular type of work connects with God’s care of the world and society.