

A THEOLOGY OF WORK, PART II

Review: Sons imitate their father, so we imitate God in his work

- God plants a garden and then says, “go finish the task”
- gardening paradigm: restructuring nature into order and beauty

Pattern of work and rest: 6 + 1

- notice ratio of ‘work’ to ‘rest’

Exodus 20:8-11

⁸ Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Importance of rest, for notice that God “rests”

(1) Enjoyment: reflect and appreciate

(2) Worship: adore and praise God

(3) Limits work: work is not our ultimate meaning

Mark 2:27

The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

The Curse of Work

Genesis 3:16-19

¹⁶ To the woman God said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” ¹⁷ And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Notice that work itself becomes subject to the curse

- “the ground” is cursed | remember gardening is paradigm of all work
- “thorns and thistles” – work becomes frustrating and fruitless

City-building driven by ambition and rebellion

Genesis 4:17-22

¹⁷ Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. ¹⁸ To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad fathered Mehujael, and Mehujael fathered Methushael, and Methushael fathered Lamech. ¹⁹ And Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. ²⁰ Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. ²¹ His brother’s name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. ²² Zillah also bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron.

We must hold in tension both doctrines of creation and fall

- creation: work as it was intended to be (‘no’ to cynicism)
- fall: work is cursed (‘no’ to idealism)

Hope of New Creation – the future of work

- story of JRR Tolkien’s “Leaf by Niggle”

Revelation 22:2

On either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

How do we work in a distinctly Christian way?

Ephesians 6:5-9

⁵ Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, ⁶ not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, ⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. ⁹ Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

(1) Strive for excellence

- give your best effort, not because of greed or supervisor watching

(2) Work with integrity and character – “with a sincere heart”

- not just legal, but good | profit as only one of the bottom lines
- not ruthless, but fair, concern for others, sympathy and generosity

(3) Be a signpost to Christ

- avoid fallacy of the “obnoxious Christian” and “ninja Christian”

Review: Sons imitate their father, so we imitate God in his work

- human beings are the *imago Dei* – we are sons of God
- so how do we imitate God? | we need to ask ourselves – what does God do?

God is a God who works!

- creation account shows God structuring and organizing the world into order and beauty
- “earth was formless and void” | world as a blank canvas, workbench with lump of clay

God creates a beautiful garden – Eden

- Eden is not just a testing ground for human holiness, but a ‘prototype’ of the whole creation transformed
- end of Bible, Revelation, shows us New Earth as a “garden-city”
- Garden of Eden was just the beginning – “go, be fruitful, fill the earth, subdue it and have dominion”
- God plants a garden and then says, “go finish the task”

Gardening is therefore the paradigm of all work

- taking the raw materials of creation and restructuring to create form and beauty, health and joy
- hairdresser: taking chaos of hair and creating beauty | bartending: facilitating friendships and making drinks
- custodial work, medical work, IT work, retail work, financial services, etc.

Pattern of work and rest: 6 + 1

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Notice the ratio of ‘work’ to ‘rest’

- work is so foundational to our make-up, it’s one of few things we can do in significant doses without harm
- ratio is not: 1 day of work, 6 days of rest | or 3.5 days of work, 3.5 days of rest
- reinforces work is not just to make money, but deeply meaningful to the human condition
- work is how we make ourselves useful to others and serve the community

Importance of rest

- not just physiologically necessary – so we can recharge our batteries and then keep working
- because God “rested” | think about that – God wasn’t winded; he doesn’t get tired or fatigued

(1) Rest, in-and-of-itself, is good and life-giving

- not just absence of work, but presence of reflection and enjoyment
- at end of 6th day, Genesis 1:31, “God saw everything he had made, and behold, it was very good”
- to stand back and take it all in and just enjoy and appreciate | not just our work, but God’s creation

(2) Rest is for worship

- in Psalms, Hebrews – concept of “rest” has deep theological meaning
- to come into presence of God, to adore and praise him | stand still and know that God is Lord

(3) Limits our work

- because we do not work on the Sabbath, it preaches to us that work is not our ultimate meaning in life

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

¹² Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. ¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. ¹⁵ **You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt**, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

In Exodus, emphasis is that God *sanctified* the Sabbath – day of worship

- in Deuteronomy, emphasis is that Sabbath is to remember their former slavery in Egypt
- why is that significant? In Egypt, Israel slaved away 7 days a week without rest
- in other words, the Sabbath is there to prevent workaholism – idolatry of work
- to not “rest” is to be a slave to greed and ambition, task-masters more cruel than Pharaoh
- Sabbath is a declaration of freedom from tyranny of work

This is so hard for us to believe

- if you can't rest, you have to look into your soul and ask why?
- what are you so afraid of that you can't take a day off?
- ultimately, trust God who made us – Sabbath is not a burden, but for our flourishing | according to our design

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Notice that work itself becomes subject to the curse

- “the ground” is cursed | remember gardening is paradigm of all work
- work becomes toilsome and drudgery – input will no longer match output

“Thorns and thistles” – work becomes frustrating and fruitless

- internally – mismatch between desire and skill (illustration: Amadeus | character of Salieri)
- externally – dysfunctional work environment or absurdities of irrational policies and bosses (illus.: Mozart)

‘City-building’ driven by ambition and rebellion

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Remember – commission in the garden was to build a city

- “work” is city-building – building the “city of God”
- but because of sin, humanity strives to build a rival city full of ambition and evil – “city of man”
- culture-making, technology development is twisted by rebellion and pride
- Genesis 11 – Tower of Babel | “let us build ourselves a city and let us make a name for ourselves”

This has enormous explanatory power

- explain the paradox of human condition:
 - human brilliance and creativity | we are made imago Dei, with gifts to build a city
 - technology for evil and destruction | cultural development with racism, sexism, marginalization of poor

A big part of being a Christian is to seek to redeem the project of city-building

- culture-making and technology-development for the healing of this world and for glory of God
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We must hold in tension both Doctrines of Creation and Fall

Creation: work as it was intended to be

- human beings were meant to find fulfillment and satisfaction in work
- therefore, don’t degrade work as merely a means to income | more meaningful and purposeful than that
- we must say “no” to cynicism and becoming jaded

Fall: work is cursed

- don’t be surprised when your job is filled with frustration and brokenness
 - don’t buy into the myth of the “perfect job” | all jobs are fallen
 - we must say “no” to dreamy idealism
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Hope of New Creation – the future of work

Revelation 22:2

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In new creation, we see this perfect, beautiful garden for the flourishing and healing of God’s people

- remember, gardening is the paradigm of all human work
- work is not part of the curse; part of the *imago Dei*
- therefore, work will continue in the New Earth, only without “thorns and thistles”

Story of JRR Tolkien's "Leaf by Niggle"

- Niggle is a painter, who had a vision of a beautiful tree he wanted to paint
- after a life-time of effort, in the end, he died having only painted a single leaf
- after his death, he is riding a train to heaven, and outside his window, on outskirts of heaven, he sees his tree
- it was his tree, perfect and finished, it's leaves opening, branching bending in wind – just as always imagined
- Niggle opened up his arms and exclaimed, "it's a gift"
- in the New Creation, Niggle's tree becomes part of the True Reality that lives on and is enjoyed forever

1 Corinthians 15:58

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

In Christ, all our labors will not come to naught, but will become fully realized and true – forever and ever

- therefore we work with courage and fortitude and resilience
 - this world will not go away, but will become renewed and made beautiful and good and just
 - all our efforts to that end, in Christ, will be redeemed and fulfilled!
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How do we work in a distinctly Christian way?

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⁶ not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, ⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

⁹ Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

(1) Strive for excellence

- give your best effort, not because of greed or supervisor watching | you are working for Christ
- re-orientation in motivation – away from self and towards God and others
- remember commission in garden | God assigns all of us to work, to be of use to others and God
- work excellently done is God-glorifying and benefits the world

(2) Work with integrity and character

- "with a sincere heart" – simplicity of the heart; single-hearted, as opposed to complexity, double-minded
- don't work with mixed motives or split loyalties | integrity of character
- be honest – let your words have integrity, always do what is right
- not just legal, but good | profit as only one of the bottom lines
- not ruthless (self-serving), but fair, concern for others, sympathy and generosity
- even at the cost of your career advancement, even at cost of profitability

(3) Be a signpost to Christ

- avoid dual fallacy of either:
 - “obnoxious Christian” who is pushy about faith, insensitive, lacking humility and doesn’t listen
 - “ninja Christian” who doesn’t want to offend, cowardly, self-protective, never taking a risk
- how do we witness to our co-workers?
 - pray for opportunities
 - be a good co-worker and friend | a person with an upright reputation
 - let your witness come organically out of a friendship and because you truly care for person
 - take courage and share Christ with your co-worker!