

Origins: Work

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[0 : 00] Well, while I was preparing for today, I came across this article from Time magazine. It's from December 1990. Yes, that is how cutting edge I really am.

December 1990, and it had the title, The Sleep Gap, Too Much to Do, Too Little Rest. And I thought, ah, I wonder what it says. And it said that a lack of rest leads to all kinds of problems. And so the article, of course, was attempting to give some kind of solutions to our lack of rest. And so here's the thing. That was 1990, a long time ago. If you can imagine how much of a problem it was, overwork and underrest then, and how much more of a problem is it today in 2022?

We are well aware in our culture that we are overworked and we are underrested. And this causes stress, it causes anxiety, and it causes a whole load of other problems that we're not even going to get into.

So in our frenetic, instant, 24-hour society, we struggle to strike a healthy rhythm between work and rest.

[1 : 07] We just can't switch off. And that is the world that we live in right now. And so what relevance, you might think, does the Bible have, these ancient words have, to us in this cultural moment?

Well, I hope you'll discover that Genesis chapter 2 could not be any more relevant for us today. Because what we see here is a clear rhythm of rest and work.

And it's what we need. Now, at Christ Church Glasgow, if you're just joining us today, we're looking at the opening chapters of Genesis. Genesis chapters 1 to 3 in the Bible. Because we're exploring the beginning of everything.

The beginning of everything. And that's why we've given our series the title Origins. Because what we find here in Genesis, in these early chapters, is how everything started. And how it's supposed to work.

And so whether you're here today and you call yourself a Christian, or even if you aren't sure what you believe, if we want to understand ourselves, if we want to understand our world, if we want to understand how to relate to other people, and more importantly, if we want to understand how we relate to the God who made us, then we need to hear what Genesis has to say about our origins.

[2 : 24] Because only when we see how we got here will we understand why we're here, and then know how we should live. So Genesis 2 gives us a true perspective on work.

Work is a good part of God's creation, but there is more to life than work. And so if we can see the foundations and see why they're there, then we will get on far better today.

Both at work and in rest. So we're going to look at three points. The origins of work, the goodness of work, and the rest of work, which we'll get to in a moment.

So first, the origins of work. Verse 1 says, Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. Now that's a summary of everything that's been said so far in Genesis.

It's the conclusion, if you like, of the creation account. So God's work is done. God is finished. And so then we read, verse 2 and 3, So on the seventh day, he rested from all his work.

[3 : 30] Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. So humanity, remember last time we looked, humanity made in the image of God was the climax of creation.

But here we get the goal of creation. The goal of creation is rest, as God rested from his work of creation. Now we're going to get to rest later, but first let's see the origins of work.

Because everything God does in creation here is described as work. So that is how foundational work is. God did it. So this is the first time work appears in the Bible, in Genesis chapter 2.

And it's repeatedly used of God. So you notice it's used three times in these two verses, verse 2 and 3. One commentator says that the word used for work here designates skilled labor, work that is performed by a craftsman or an artisan.

Such is the measure of the finesse and professional skills of God's work. And so the magnificence of creation is a highly skilled work of God.

[4 : 45] So yes, God spoke and created, but it was a labor of love. He enjoyed creating. And so while the word for created in the Hebrew is only used of God, actually the word for work is used of ordinary human work.

So God is doing work here. And this whole concept of work couldn't really get a more striking introduction. Because God was working long before human beings arrived on the scene.

And God's work gave him great job satisfaction. God worked for the sheer joy and delight of working. And that's where we've got to start if we're going to understand work.

God is a worker. Can you see that? And so it's hardly surprising that humans, us, made in the image of God, reflecting him, should also be workers too.

In fact, work is the very first thing that God gets the first man to do. So after this broad brushstroke, panoramic view of creation, we get in Genesis chapter 1, we get the finer details, finer picture here in Genesis chapter 2, where the focus narrows off of the universe, as it were.

[6 : 04] And its focus changes on to human beings and God's relationship with them. So now we're zooming in in Genesis chapter 2, and we're looking at the story of humanity.

So we begin with God's relationship to his people, where the rest, as they say, is history. And this relationship is emphasized in two ways.

First, by the introduction of a new name for God. And so if you look down at your Bible, until now, it has always been God. It's the word Elohim, God, the all-powerful, majestic, transcendent God.

So we read in chapter 1, and God said, and God saw, God called, God created, God finished, God blessed, God rested. But now we get, in chapter 2, the Lord God.

Lord translates the Hebrew name Yahweh. It's the personal covenant name of God. And so while God emphasizes his, the name God emphasizes his power and majesty as creator of all things, the word Lord comes along and emphasizes God's personal nature as the God who enters into a relationship with the people that he has made.

[7 : 21] And then secondly, until now, the order has always been the heavens and the earth.

Genesis chapter 1, verse 1, the heavens and the earth. Genesis chapter 2, verse 1, the heavens and the earth.

Then Genesis chapter 2, verse 4, at the start, the heavens and the earth. But what happens now is we get a reversal, a mirror, if you like, where it becomes the earth and the heavens.

And so after this cosmic creation in Genesis chapter 1, we get Genesis chapter 2, and we get the human creation from the perspective of humanity.

God interacting with the people he has made. And so the narrative in chapter 2 sets this up. So verse 5, Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth, and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth, and there was no one to work the ground.

But streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. Okay, so the creation was completed, but you notice there was still work needing to be done.

[8 : 28] There were no plants yet, because there had been no rain, and there were no people. So the creation still needed work. And so this isn't like making Lego.

I love making Lego. If my son Matthew ever lets me get a shot of his Lego to make it, I enjoy it. But with Lego, what you do is, you know, you create something brick by brick.

And then when you're done, you've got a Star Wars Millennium Falcon, or you've got a Minecraft Creeper Mine, or whatever it is. And that's it. You've built your Lego, and your Lego's done.

Because the Lego is basically an inanimate object that goes up on the shelf and gathers dust. Until somebody kicks a football off it, and it breaks, and then you have to start the rebuilding process again.

So the Lego's existence does not depend on your continued care and provision. But that's unlike God's creation. Because God's creation here needs continued work.

[9 : 28] So God enlists some co-workers to help. Verse 7. Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

And the man became a living being. Can you see that? God stoops down to form the man, Adam, in Hebrew, from the dust of the ground.

Adama. God is down working to form the man. Actually, the Lord God, we could say, is a manual laborer. He's working with his hands.

Because that's the picture we get here. Essentially, he makes the man out of a pile of dirt that's on the ground. And then what does God do? Well, God breathes into his nostrils the breath of life for the man to become a living being.

So the Lord God, this is very practical, this work here. The Lord God gives a pile of dirt the kiss of life. And there's a wordplay in the Hebrew here which seems to emphasize this close connection of the man with the ground.

[10:37] And yet the close connection of the man with the God who made him. And so it pictures God's authority. He's over the man. The man's authority over the creation. He's over the ground.

And there's this deep intimacy between God and the man he has made. The man stands between the Lord God and the ground. And so the Lord God rules over the man.

And the man is to rule over the creation. And so what comes next? Well, it is a command to work.

And we saw this already in Genesis chapter 1 at verse 28.

It says, It says, It says, It says, That's what God says.

And then again, Genesis 2, it's the same. Genesis 2 verse 15. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

[11:45] Okay, we'll get to this in a moment. But can you see, first of all, the origins of work? The point is that God is a worker. And God gives humanity work to do in this world.

And so the implication is that work is fundamental to our existence as human beings. We are humans and we were made to work. Okay, that's the first thing, the origins of work.

The second is the goodness of work. Work was a fundamental part of God's good world. So verse 8 and 9, we read, Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden, and there he put the man he had formed.

The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground, trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

So what's happening? God has planted a garden, but the garden still needs work. If you've got a garden, you know gardens have always needed work ever since the creation.

[12:53] But we're not just talking here about any garden. This is the Garden of Eden. And Eden means pleasure. It means delight. This is paradise. It is full of beauty and full of bounty.

So this was the perfect home for man to live in. Where God's goodness and God's grace can be seen and how he provides for humanity.

And yet the Lord God puts the man to work in paradise. Verse 15, he took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to take care of it.

So man's purpose in life was not to chill out on a hammock in the Garden of Eden, supping a nice tropical drink. No, he was there to work.

One commentator, Victor Hamilton, says, There is no magic in Eden. Gardens cannot look after themselves. They are not self-perpetuating. Don't we know it?

[13:51] So God puts the man to work because the world needed him and the world needs everybody after him to work. So just remember, Adam is the representative of humanity.

So what God expects of him, God expects of us. And so in verse 15, to work it implies God intended the creation to be the source of everything that we need to live.

So we're to develop the raw materials of this world and to put them to good use. That's working the world. And then we're to take care of it or to keep it.

That implies that God intended us to be good stewards over everything. So we're not to exploit or misuse the creation, but we're to wisely conserve it as well as develop it.

And so can you see how work is essential to what it means to be a human being in this world? So God didn't design the world to be productive by itself.

[14:55] No, he designed the world to work through labor, through human creativity, through human culture making. That's how God set up this world. Martin Luther, the German reformer, captures this well when he said, God gives the wool, but not without our labor.

If it is on the sheep, it makes no garment. Okay, so if you want a wooly jumper, a wooly jumper is not just going to jump off a sheep and land on you. You have to shear the sheep to get the wool to make the jumper.

And that's how God's world is supposed to work. So Genesis 2 here is declaring the goodness of work. Now, of course, Genesis 3 is the fall of humanity. And we'll get to that when the thorns and thistles come and they make work much harder.

But notice that work itself isn't a curse. Work isn't a consequence of our sin. No, work is a fundamental part of God's good purposes for all of humanity.

And that's why being unemployed is difficult. If you've ever known unemployment, it's difficult. It is distressing. It is even demeaning. And the reason is it's because we were meant to work.

[16:11] Not just because we need the money to live, though we do, but because we need work to live. We need work. And so from the very beginning, work has been synonymous with what it means to be a human being.

Which means it's not just that some types of work are significant. No, work is significant because work is deeply rooted in creation.

So it's not a chore that's meant to occupy our days as we live our lives in this world. No, God uses work to accomplish his purposes. It is essential for the flourishing of humanity, but it's also essential for the functioning of our world.

Flourishing of humanity and the functioning of our world. And so we get this beautiful picture here of life as it is meant to be. Of God in perfect relationship with the man he has made.

With man living under God's rule and fulfilling his responsibilities and getting to work. So let's just think about the implications of the goodness of work. Because if we grasp the proper place of work in our lives, then we'll be better equipped to approach our work in the right frame of mind.

[17:28] Whatever it is that we do. You see, the culture, it forces us to adopt the wrong attitude towards our work. Either by overvaluing our work or by undervaluing our work.

And so our culture overvalues work by suggesting to us that your work is the most important thing in your life. And so work can become what we worship.

It can be what we sacrifice our lives for. It can be where we get our identity from. Work can consume every waking hour of our lives. And it can even keep us awake when we're trying to sleep.

That's how work can be overvalued in our lives. The Welsh minister, Martin Lloyd-Jones, was speaking to a bunch of medical doctors. And he said this. He said, somewhere in Pembrokeshire, a tombstone is said to bear the inscription, John Jones, born a man, died a grocer.

That's all it said. He said, there are many whom I have had the privilege of meeting whose tombstone might well bear the grim epitaph, born a man, died a doctor. He says, the greatest danger which confronts the medical man is that he may become lost in his profession.

[18:44] And so it doesn't matter whether you're a grocer or whether you're a doctor or whatever you are, if your work defines you, if your work is the most important thing about you, then it has taken on a significance that is far greater than God ever intended it to have.

So our culture can overvalue work. I think we know that. But our culture can also undervalue work. What I mean is that our culture suggests that your value is dependent on what you earn.

So the more you earn, the better your job and the more significant or important or special you are as a person. So more money equals more value, either the job or the person.

But there's another way in which work can be devalued, I think, by Christians. And it's when Christian work is viewed as if it's the only work that counts. And secular work isn't really that special or important.

So it can be downplayed or maybe even divorced from God altogether. And so you're only really serving God if you do church stuff. You're not serving God if you just work a regular day job.

[19:59] But that's not the biblical understanding of work that we see here. We don't get any of that. Just think about Adam. Adam was a gardener and he was working for free.

So the value of work clearly isn't measured by what it is or by what it earns us. Actually, I think some of our most valuable work as human beings, as well as some of our hardest work, isn't even paid at all.

Because it's done in the home by parents bringing up their children. Or by children looking after their elderly parents. And most of it doesn't even take place during office hours.

How about that? And yet it contributes to God's purposes for how this world functions and moves forward. Because if we live in God's world as God's people, bearing God's image, then our work, whatever our work is, reflects him and serves his purposes.

I love the story that John Stott tells of three men who were at work in a stone quarry. They were each asked, what are you doing? So the first man said, I'm cutting a stone.

[21 : 16] The second man said, I'm earning a living. And then the third man was asked, what are you doing in the stone quarry? And so he stopped. He put down his pickaxe and he said, I am building a cathedral.

And Stott comments, he said, the third man looked beyond his tools and his wages to the ultimate end. He was serving. He was cooperating with the architect.

And isn't that how we should view our work? Whatever it is, seeing our work as cooperating with the great architect of the universe who is God. And serving his purposes.

And so work is good. Whatever it is, unless it's sinful, work is good. And we honor the God who gave the work to us with the capacity to do it.

By doing it well and doing our best. Again, Martin Luther says this. He said, God's people please God even in the least and most trifling matters.

[22 : 18] For he will be working all things through you. He will milk the cow through you and perform the most servile duties through you. And all the greatest and least duties alike will be pleasing to him.

That's a great way to think about work, isn't it? So the goodness of work has clear implications for how we approach ours. Okay, that's work. First point, the origins of work.

Second, the goodness of work. Thirdly and finally, the rest of work. What do I mean? Well, Genesis 2 gives the perfect picture of rest. Let's read verse 2 and 3 again.

By the seventh day, God had finished the work he had been doing. So on the seventh day, he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it, he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

So you notice the seventh day is different. God stopped after six days and he rested on the seventh day. Not because he was tired, not because he needed rest, but because the creation was complete.

[23 : 23] It was perfect. It was a job well done. And so his rest was the goal of creation. And it's different and special. And it's different and special. The seventh day because it says God made the seventh day holy.

This is the first time the word holy appears in the Bible. The first thing that is described as holy. So it means it's separated from all the rest, all the other days.

It's set apart as belonging to God. And so it's significant because the seventh day is repeated here three times. And unlike the previous days where there is an evening and a morning, there is no evening and morning when it comes to the seventh day.

And so there's a sense in which the seventh day still continues. Now, the Hebrew word for rested here is where we get our word Sabbath from.

So God here is enjoying a Sabbath rest. That doesn't mean he's doing nothing. He's sustaining creation. Otherwise, we wouldn't be here.

[24 : 29] But God has built Sabbath rest into his creation, into this world. And so the Genesis days of creation with six followed by seven with work followed by rest are set into the very fabric of creation.

And they establish a pattern that is meant to be continued. In other words, God's work pattern is supposed to be our work pattern.

And that's why remembering the Sabbath and keeping it holy is one of the Ten Commandments. And in the Ten Commandments, in Exodus chapter 20, the Sabbath is tied to the creation.

So we read, In six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. So can you see how rest is fundamental to what it means to be human? So God rested after his work and God commands us to do the same.

[25 : 35] It is how we are hardwired. It's how he made us. He set this rhythm of work and then rest into this world. And it's there for our benefit and for our blessing.

And that's why we've got weeks. Have you ever wondered why we've got weeks? You're thinking, come off it, Jonathan. I didn't come to church to think about why we've got weeks. Well, you know why we've got days, don't you?

We've got days because the earth rotates every 24 hours. And so when the earth is facing the sun, we get daytime. When the earth rotates a bit more and it isn't facing the sun or we're not facing the sun, then we get nighttime.

And it happens in a 24-hour period. And so that's how we've got days, isn't it? But have you ever wondered why we've got weeks? Well, the answer is here in Genesis.

We've got weeks because that's how God made the world and us to function. So our lives and our society won't function as it should if we go against the grain of how God has set things up.

[26 : 44] I was reading this week that apparently the French Revolution, during it, they made the working week longer. They had a great idea and they thought, let's make a 10-day week.

Let's push people to work nine days, get far more productivity, and then give them the 10th day off as the day of rest. And yet it was so bad for the people, so bad for the population, so bad for society, so bad to get anything done.

It just broke down and they were forced to go back to a seven-day week. And so while we have still got a seven-day week, if we just treat the seventh day like any other day, it is hardly surprising that we feel overworked and under-rested.

Because if we violate the rhythm that God has set up of work and rest, it is bound to lead to disorder. Because if we don't realize our limits, we'll suffer in all kinds of ways, physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually.

Because God has designed you and me to rest. And if we don't rest, then we'll live to regret it. And so will our families, if we're honest.

[27 : 59] You know the saying, nobody ever said on their deathbed, I wish I'd spent more time at the office. But a day of rest, as God intended, won't just help us reorder our busy lives.

More importantly, it will enable us to enjoy God's rest. Because while work is good, it's a part of the created order, work was never meant to be the goal of life.

There is more to life than work. And that's why the Sabbath helps us reorientate our lives around the God who made us. Because it points us, the Sabbath does, to God's ultimate purpose for the creation.

Because the Sabbath rest isn't merely resting from work. It's resting in God himself. God wants us to enter his rest.

What does that mean? Well, we're no longer living in this perfect Genesis 1 and 2 world. We're living in this Genesis 3 world, which is cursed.

[29 : 10] And yet the Bible speaks of God restoring everything and bringing this world back to its original, perfect seventh day, as it was here.

And so God's plan has been achieved through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. And it will be complete when Jesus Christ returns. And that's why the book of Hebrews says this.

It says, the promise of entering his rest still stands. So how do we enter God's rest? Hebrews goes on. Now we who have believed enter that rest.

And so we can enter God's rest right now by believing in Jesus. And we can live in anticipation of the rest to come. And then Hebrews goes on to say, there remains then a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

For anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. It's a reference to Genesis, when God finished his work of creation.

[30 : 11] Because the reason that we can enjoy rest is because Jesus has finished his work of salvation. Before Jesus died on the cross, do you remember what he said?

He said, it is finished. Which means Jesus finished the work he came to do to bring us into relationship with God. And that's why we don't need to work hard or strive hard to be acceptable to God.

We can rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Jesus said himself, come to me, all you who are weary and burdened.

And what? And I will give you rest. Jesus gives you rest for your soul in a fast-paced, busy world.

And he also gives the promise of ultimate rest to come in the future. And so what are we supposed to do in the meantime? Just sit around and wait?

[31 : 13] No. Because of what Jesus has done for us, we get to work for him. With whatever it is that he has given us to do. And it's different things for all of us.

And as we practice the Sabbath by taking a day of rest, we become a disruptive witness to a busy world. Because we're declaring that there is more to life than work.

Sabbath rest is an act of defiance in a culture that says you prove your worth by the work that you do. You're more significant if you work seven days a week, 80 hours a week, 20 hours a day.

You're valuable. You're worthy if you do that. You're so important. And your job is so important. But if you work in that way, you're worthy.

You're valuable. But what we do as those who believe in Jesus Christ, we recognize, no, that's not what life is all about.

[32 : 15] That's not what work is supposed to be. And so we say, no, I've got other priorities. I believe there is a God. And he is in charge of this world.

And his ways are best. And he knows what he's doing. And so he's got my life. He's got my family. He's got my work in his hands. And I'm trusting that he will provide everything I need.

Eric Liddell in the film Chariots of Fire is a fantastic example of this. It's one of my favorite films, Chariots of Fire. I watched it again last week. And it tells the story of Eric Liddell and then Harold Abrahams, who were both competing in the 1924 Olympics in Paris.

And before the 100 meters final, Abrahams says in the changing room to his friend, he says, You, Aubrey, are my most complete man. You're brave, compassionate, kind, a content man.

That's your secret, contentment. I'm 24 and I've never known it. I'm forever in pursuit and I don't even know what it is that I'm chasing. But now, in one hour's time, I'll be out there again.

[33 : 22] I'll raise my eyes and look down that corridor four feet wide with ten lonely seconds to justify my whole existence. But will I? Abraham said no peace.

He had no rest because his work, his running, defined him as a person. Whereas Eric Liddell was a Christian. And because he had deep rest in Jesus Christ, he was willing to give up the chance of winning a gold medal by refusing to run on a Sunday.

And this is what he told his sister Jenny. He said, I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure. So his running was a gift from God, a gift that he could enjoy.

But it didn't define him. There were more important things. And so, we can accept the work that we've got to do. And we should do it with joy.

Because we can see beyond the work itself to the even greater purpose of rest in God. Rest now and rest to come.

[34 : 31] Rest now and rest. It's right. Trust now. It's not impossible. It's not artificially. It's not impossible.

It's not no works. It's not always an action you can get here. It's not far as a skill you can play against the same skill arrives and you can figure it out.