**The Gift of Work**

Ephesians 6:5-8; Genesis 1:1-5; 26-28; 2:1-3

When you think of **WORK**, what comes to mind? How do you feel about work? WHY do you work?

As you sit down at your screen, dial into your Zoom meeting, drive to the hospital, sit down with a group of children, start your next project, have your next meeting, change another diaper, knock down another wall, dig another ditch - do you feel that ***YOUR WORK MATTERS?***

Often with work you feel **like an orange** and the juice is being squeezed out of you. Management structures bear down on you to get the most productivity they can out of you - and sometimes don’t care if they use you up along the way.

But there is another way. Some of us feel more like **an orange tree** naturally bearing fruit through our work - like we were made to do the work we are doing and that the work is making a difference.

* Do you feel used and abused in work?
* Or do you feel fruitful and fulfilled in work?

Listen to God’s word in Ephesians 6 and imagine you were a household slave in the first century.

“Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, ***with a sincere heart***, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, ***doing the will of God from the heart***.” Ephesians 6:5-6

Scripture does not endorse or support slavery. But God’s Word speaks to all situations in life, including slavery, giving believers ***perspective and resources*** to endure and even rejoice in the most difficult assignments.

Our lesson today is simple:

**All work is a gift, so give thanks for the work God has called you to do**

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Obviously criminal work, ***sinful work is not a gift from God.*** Those who work in human trafficking, organized crime, corrupt financial management, fraudulent sales, the abortion industry - sinful, evil work is not a gift from God but rather an expression of the fallen world we live in. But all NORMAL WORK - even the most menial and mundane - is a gift from God and something to be grateful for.

The calling of Ephesians 6 is to contentment in the place God has assigned to us. Gratitude. We need to reclaim a theology of **VOCATION** - believing that God calls ALL BELIEVERS to work, not just pastors and missionaries. All work matters. ***All work*** is a gift from God.

Here is where we are heading the next few weeks in this mini-series about WORK:

**God and the Rest of the Week**

1. The Gift of Work
2. The Struggle of Work
3. The Call to Work
4. The Gift of Rest

Today we will focus on Genesis 1, seeing how ***work is a gift*** from God TO US and a gift from God THROUGH US to others. Next week we will look at Genesis 3 and remember that ***work is also fallen*** - thorns and thistles are real - so all work is a struggle.

Yet in week three we will see that ***God calls us*** to join Him in His work. To have a CALLING you need a CALL-ER. How do you know God has called you to the work you are doing? How does God lead us into the right place to serve? Finally, we will see ***the gift of rest***. There are limits to the work we can do - so God commands us to stop, to rest. His work continues and His work will be finished - which gives us hope to press on in our work while maintaining a healthy pattern of working and resting.

Today we focus on the gift of work. There are two parts to the message today - the gift of God TO US and the gift of God THROUGH US to others. Each part has an application.

**All work is a Gift**

* A gift of God ***to us*** → Gratitude
* A gift of God ***through us*** → Service

“Be filled with the Spirit… submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Ephesians 5:18,21

We are going to jump over to Genesis 1 today but this is still a part of our series in Ephesians as we ***apply the gospel*** to every part of our lives. Paul’s instruction to slaves and masters flows from Ephesians 5:18 in the same way as his instructions to husbands and wives, parents and children. First we see the gift of God TO US in the Holy Spirit. Then we see the gift of God through us as we submit to one another and live in service to them for the glory of God.

So we have two simple applications today: first, to thank God for the work He has given us; and second, to recommit ourselves to serving others through our work. ***Join me now in Genesis chapter 1*** - the beginning of the Bible.

**All work is a Gift**

* A gift of God ***to us***

“In the beginning, God created… And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done.” Genesis 1:1; 2:2

The first thing we learn about God in the Bible is that **He WORKS**. The creation account is presented as ***a seven day work week.*** Isn’t that fascinating? The whole Bible is so relevant - so helpful. Moses wrote this chapter of the Jewish Law to help God’s people understand what God expected of them. Clearly, God has always expected His people to work.

And it’s important to see that ***work is not a punishment***, it is not a curse, not a consequence of the fall. Work is a gift. It is the first thing we see God doing and, when He created Adam and called him to work, that was part of the original creation that was “very good.”

**All work is a Gift**

* A gift of God ***to us***

“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them ***have dominion*** over the fish… the birds… over all the earth.” Genesis 1:26

An expression of ***the image of God*** - stamped on all people in all nations at all times - is the ability and the call to WORK. We reflect God’s image and His glory when we work.

In ancient times great kings built **statues of themselves** and placed them throughout their realm so their subjects would see their image and give thanks for the peace and prosperity provided by that ruler. God did not want statues of Him all over Israel - in fact, He expressly forbade the making of such idols - but instead imprinted His image on all of humanity. And we see that image - we see God’s glory - reflected in people when they work.

* Think of the **efficient and friendly nurse** who cares for you in the hospital. She (or he) checks in on you frequently, she responds when you have a need, she connects you with the testing and care you need. You feel ***the love of God***, His attention and care, through that nurse.
* Think of the **wise financial advisor** who comes alongside you when you are young and helps you plan for your future - setting aside funds for an emergency, saving for a car, putting into retirement and investing strategically in kingdom initiatives (if you have a Christian advisor). You feel ***the wisdom of God*** guiding your financial decisions through that investor.
* Think of the **energetic teacher** who joyfully helps your kindergartener learn his letters and the sounds they make. She makes the whole class feel at home, safe, cared for, valued. She provides order and direction. She creates an environment where every child matters and ever child can learn. You feel ***the structure and authority of God***, His security and truth, in that teacher.
* Think of the **hard-working construction woman** or man who rehabs your kitchen or the **skilled auto mechanic** who fixes your car for a reasonable rate. You feel ***the diligence and faithfulness of God*** through the work those people do for you - work that you could not do as well on your own.

When people exercise DOMINION - when they work, bringing order and life - we see the image and glory of God in them.

* Think of the **godly mother** who is home with her children every day, attending to all of their needs and demands, maintaining a clean and orderly home and even patiently tolerating her husband’s many shortcomings. Don’t you see the glory of God shining through her? You feel His love, His presence, His instruction, His care, His discipline, His grace.

It has often been pointed out that there are two stages in the creation account - first ***God FORMS the world, then He FILLS it.*** He creates the space for the heavens, the oceans and the land - then He fills the heavens with stars and planets, the oceans with water life and the land with land life. But God does not just randomly fill spaces - He scattered the stars with such perfect precision that life on earth would be possible. He created ecosystems in the oceans and jungles and prairies that would be perfectly balanced for the kinds of creatures He made to flourish in them. God forms and fills, or to say it another way, God creates and cultivates - and then God commissions Adam to continue that work.

**All work is a Gift**

* A gift of God ***to us*** - to create and cultivate, as He did

“Be fruitful and multiply and ***fill the earth*** and subdue it, and have dominion…” Genesis 1:28

The command to “fill the earth” is not just about having lots of babies and spreading out. It is about ***CULTIVATING the world*** - CIVILIZING IT; subduing it; ruling over it with intentionality to promote the flourishing of all life on earth.

God started this work and ***it was GOOD***. **But it was not COMPLETE**. He left ongoing work for Adam to do, along with Eve and then the children and grandchildren they would have.

Think about it. God did not create a million people. He created two. God did not create farms, He created the potential for farms. Farmers had to come along to till the soil, plant the seeds and care for the fields. God did not create paintings or other works of art, but He created the potential for music, painting, sculpting and all other forms of art. Artists had to come along to make instruments, write songs, grab pigment to make paint and then brushes, and so forth.

Work is a good gift of God TO US. God creates and cultivates and when we work we reflect His image and glory. So our first application is to give thanks.

**All work is a Gift**

* A gift of God ***to us*** → Gratitude

“Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ.” Ephesians 6:5

***Are you content in the work God has given you right now?*** Can you give thanks for that work, even if it’s hard and mundane? Paul exhorted slaves to obey; to submit to their masters respectfully, sincerely, as if they were serving JESUS not an earthly master. Do you see your work as service to GOD not to an earthly boss?

**All work is a Gift**

* A gift of God ***to us*** → Gratitude

“***As bondservants of Christ***, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will, ***as to the Lord*** and not to man.” Eph. 6:6-7

All believers are servants of Jesus. And all work is a gift from Him. So let’s be grateful. Let’s serve Jesus by working with all of our hearts - for Him. Second, work is a gift of God through us to others.

**All work is a Gift**

* A gift of God ***through us*** → Service

“As bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ***rendering service*** with a good will, as to the Lord and not to man.” Eph. 6:6-7

***WHY do you work?***

* Jot down the first few reasons that come to mind: 1) to make money; 2) to provide for my family; 3) so I don’t become homeless and starve; 4) because I enjoy what I do; 5) because I’m good at what I do; 6) because people affirm my work; 7) because I am making a name for myself in the business - building a positive reputation…

***Do you think of your work as SERVICE?*** Do you see your day to day labor as MINISTRY?

Do you see this service as service TO THE LORD? By serving people, you are serving God with your work! God is working THROUGH YOU to bless people.

**Martin Luther** expressed this really well in the 1500s when the typical mindset was that only priests and monks did ministry. He attacked this separation of the spiritual and secular by preaching the priesthood of ALL believers - “WE are a royal priesthood, a holy nation!” He wanted everyone to see their work as a calling from God to serve their fellow man.

In fact, Luther said that through our work we are ***“the fingers of God”*** to love and care for people. Here are two key texts he used to illustrate this.

 **All work is a Gift**

* A gift of God ***through us*** → Service

“Praise your God, O Zion! For ***he strengthens the bars of your gates***… He makes peace in your borders.” Psalm 147:12-14

***How does God strengthen the bars of a city’s gates?*** Through the soldiers who stand guard, through the local police or militia, through the governing officials who set policy, even through good neighbors who keep an eye on what’s happening and communicate with each other. Or look at this one:

 **All work is a Gift**

* A gift of God ***through us*** → Service

“The eyes of all look to you, and ***you give them their food*** in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.” Psalm 145:15-16

***How does God provide food for everyone?*** There was a period of time when God sent bread from heaven and directly provided manna for His people. But most of the time God provides food for people by means of the WORK of other people.

* The farmer grows the food.
* The truck driver delivers the food.
* The grocer sells the food.
* We eat the food!

**These are the MASKS of God**. He could feed everyone directly but He chooses to remain hidden behind 7 billion masks. He works through all kinds of workers in all kinds of businesses and through your efforts God provides the food that people need.

This is an example of ***COMMON GRACE***. God is gracious and merciful to all people. He sends literal rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous. **All of the blessings of creation are available to everyone** whether they believe in Jesus or not - as a common grace. Everyone can watch the sun set. Everyone can enjoy a morning breeze. Everyone can marvel at the diversity of birds in Florida. And everyone can benefit from the work of people, experiencing the grace of God in a million forms.

When someone does their job with **exceptional skill** we are all inspired and want to honor them.



Remember ***Captain Sully*** and the 2009 emergency landing in the Hudson River after both engines of his airplane were disabled by a flock of birds? With amazing presence of mind and almost miraculous skill Sully was able to “land” the plane in the Hudson River so that all 155 people on board survived.

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Do you see how ***YOUR WORK is God’s way of blessing the people around you?*** YOU are a mask of God that allows people to see Him as they experience the gift of your work.

* Think of the blessing that **a good counselor** is to a family. God is helping you understand yourself and helping you grow through the wisdom and insight of a skilled counselor.
* Think of the blessing of **a good lawyer** when you need help. Say your house is heading toward foreclosure and you need someone to submit the appropriate appeals and paperwork to prevent foreclosure and even bankruptcy. God is protecting and blessing you financially through the lawyer.
* Think of the blessing **a good realtor** is to help you find the right home. God is leading you to a place where you can flourish through that realtor.

Some jobs are easier to see the hands of God in or to hear the voice of God through. But the point is that **ALL WORK is a gift of God** through you to people. Consider what would happen if you stopped mowing your lawn and weeding your garden. For a while it would be ok, but before too long - especially since we live in a jungle - your house would move from being an eye-sore to being a real danger to the community, allowing all kinds of critters to move in and multiply. Whether you mow the lawn or hire someone to do it, cultivating and managing your property is necessary work to protect and bless your family and your neighbors.

One more example. A man came home from work one day and as soon as he opened the door he was worried because ***the house was a mess!*** His kids were running around like crazy people, toys and clothes were everywhere; dishes were piled up in the dining room and spread out around the living room. Scanning the house he didn’t see his wife and grew even more concerned.

Climbing through the mess, ***he eventually found his wife*** reclining in their bed with a cup of hot tea and a book in her hand. He looked at her, waiting for an explanation. When none came, eventually he said, “Honey, is everything ok?”

She looked back and said, “Oh. Well, you asked recently what it is that I do all day. Well. ***This is what happens when I don’t do it***.”

**Moms** - does your work matter? We all know that it’s some of the most important work there is. God literally saves the lives of small children every day through the care and attention of mothers. You might think that cleaning and doing the laundry is mundane, meaningless work - but the truth is that it is essential work that God does through you to protect and bless your children.

***If no one cleaned a home*** it would be ok for a while but eventually things would get so messy and gross that bacteria and mold would accumulate, the family would start to get sick and could actually die!

***Your work matters.*** Your work is God’s gift to people. I’m very grateful for the book Every Good Endeavor by Pastor Tim Keller. He writes (p. 61):

“Not only are the most modest jobs - like plowing a field or digging a ditch - the ‘masks’ through which God cares for us, but so are the most basic social roles and tasks, such as voting, participating in public institutions, and being a father or mother. These are all God’s callings, all ways of doing God’s work in the world, ***all ways through which God distributes his gifts to us***.” Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*

***Let’s be grateful*** for the work God has called us to do. **Work is God’s gift TO US** and we should be grateful for it. Let’s reject the old way of thinking that there is sacred work that scores more points with God and secular work that scores fewer or no points with God. All work matters! YOUR work matters!

***Is work a challenge?*** Yes! All work is a struggle because we live in a fallen world. Come back next week to discuss this and see how the gospel redeems work and empowers us to live as salt and light in a dark and dying world!

Work is a struggle, but if we walk in the fullness of the Spirit and give thanks for the work God has called us to, we can start to get past the feeling of being an orange with the life being squeezed out of us every day and move toward the feeling of being a fruitful orange tree that God is blessing through our work and through us God is blessing others.

Because work is **God’s gift THROUGH US to others**. We reflect God’s own glory when we work - when we create and cultivate the world God made and entrusted to us. Let’s give thanks for all the work people do and recognize that God gives us so many good gifts through the diligent, faithful work of people. And let’s do our work as MINISTRY. Let’s serve the Lord by serving people with our work!