

Work – beyond the Gen-3 Curse

Hi. This week, we look at Genesis 3 and the frustrations that go with working. The sermon title was “Work is more than a curse” ... but the theme of the sermon was more about our role in redeeming our work and workplace. Phil highlighted that ‘work’ or ‘occupation’ is a lot more than the things we do from 9am-5pm. In one of my daughter’s university textbooks for her Occupational Therapy course, Elle found this definition:

“Occupations are groups of activities and tasks of everyday life, named, organised and given value and meaning by individuals and a culture; occupation is everything people do to occupy themselves, including looking after themselves (self-care), enjoying life (leisure) and contributing to the social and economic fabric of their communities (productivity) ...performed with some consistence and regularity.”¹

God created us with the intent that we would be actively involved in caring for and stewarding our world. (Gen 1:28, 2:15) Yet Genesis 3 highlights that work is now hard work and impacted by the effects of sin.

GETTING STARTED: What are some of the things that are part of your daily routine(s)? What does a normal ‘work day’ look like for you? What challenges and struggles do you deal with as part of your work?

READ: GENESIS 3:1-20

🗨️ What things stood out for you, from the sermon this week?

🗨️ Karen shared about her role at BaptistCare, particularly as one of their aged care residential facilities was impacted by Covid-19. This virus has been a major challenge for BaptistCare, especially in caring for staff and residents, dealing with complaints, maintaining adequate staffing levels and facilitating connectedness between residents and their families. Karen’s role and mode of working has changed. What were the positive things about her work? What did you note as some of the core challenges? What attitudes and disciplines has the organisation and its staff had to adopt, to adapt to these challenges and constantly changing conditions?

TEAR APART THE TEXT

🗨️ Read Gen 1:28-30 and Gen 2:15. What work was given to Adam and Eve?

🗨️ What is the difference between subduing the earth vs abusing and exploiting the earth? What is the difference between a mandate to ‘steward’ the creation vs a consumer / capitalist mentality, of profiteering by utilising resources, in whatever way possible? What sorts of things disturb you about how our insatiable consumer demand? (eg choices that businesses make about how they will operate? exploitation of people, incl those in developing countries? Discrimination? Unsafe work practices? Environmental impacts including sustainability and carbon footprint?)

🗨️ Phil highlighted that the introduction of sin into the garden impacted the relationship of humans with God, the relational harmony between human beings, the power dynamic between men and women, as well as impacting the natural world. In Gen 3:14-24, what specific aspects of work are impacted by sin? How have your work, workplace and work relationships been impacted by sin?

Hugh Whelchel, from *Institute of Faith, Work & Economics*, writes about four key principles we need to remember when we think about the idea of stewardship:

- **The principle of ownership:** remembering that “*The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.*” (Ps 24)
- **The principle of responsibility:** “While we complain about our rights here on earth, the Bible constantly asks, ‘What about your responsibilities?’ Owners have rights; stewards have responsibilities.”
- **The principle of accountability:** “A steward is one who manages the possessions of another. We are all stewards of the resources, abilities, and opportunities that God has entrusted to our care, and one day each one of us will be called to give an account for how we have managed what the Master has given us.”
- **The principle of reward:** In Colossians 3:23-24 Paul writes: “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”²

🗨️ Which of these principles do you find helpful and applicable in how you approach your work?

¹ Townsend, E. Polatajko, H. (2013) *Enabling Occupation II. Advancing An Occupational Therapy Vision for Health, Wellbeing & Justice Through Occupation. 2nd Ed.* (Ottawa, Ontario: CAOT Publications ACE), p377.

² <https://twotenmag.com/magazine/issue-11/columns-and-departments/four-principles-of-biblical-stewardship/>

① Phil highlighted a number of principles in how we approach our work:

- Go dependent on God, praying for help and asking to succeed;
- Integrity – be meticulously honest, trustworthy and scrupulous re doing a full day’s work;
- Skill, ability & creativity – Be good at what you do and be committed to developing your skills;
- Influence & use opportunities: Shape the ethos of the culture that you are working in;
- Develop and maintain good relationships with colleagues and customers;
- Love and serve others, including listening to the deep burdens of others;
- Have a positive attitude re money, including working to earn to give (rather than to ‘have’);
- Having an attitude of thanks, gratitude (including gratitude to others), hope and humility.

In an article by Andrew Laird, titled “Redeeming Work: What does that mean?”³, he writes:

“Redemption means that we are rescued *from* slavery *to* freedom. And so our attitudes, behaviour, values, and application at work are also redeemed *from* something *to* something else. Or to put it another way, in some ways I experience God’s original creation purpose and a foretaste of the glory to come in my daily work in this broken world. Here are just 10 ways in which we might experience something of this in our work:

- * From necessity to service
- * From pointlessness to purpose
- * From dissatisfaction to fulfilment
- * From slavery to freedom
- * From alienation to connection
- * From failure to recovery
- * From waste to blessing
- * From isolation to relationship
- * From pleasing myself to honouring God
- * From success to fruitfulness.”

Others have written some great principles on living out our faith at work.⁴

🗨️ Our work can be really hard. There can be stresses due to financial problems, interpersonal conflicts, disagreements over business decisions and difficult contractual negotiations. Some places that we work in are not positive or happy places. In some workplaces, there are toxic bosses and colleagues that we have to deal with, so getting out of bed and heading to work can be stressful. Which of the principles (above) speak into your work situation?

Kara Martin, the Sydney-based author of *Workship: How to Worship God with your Work*,⁵ highlights that, when Jesus stood up to read the scroll in the temple (Luke 4:18-19), the passage he chose from Isaiah 61, to articulate his mission statement for the inauguration of the messianic age, wasn’t just about spiritual liberation. Isaiah 61 is a passage which talks about injustices and corrupt business practices in Isaiah’s time that would be wiped away, when the kingdom of God breaks into our world. Kara highlights that, in Rom 8:19-23, the whole creation is crying out for redemption. We are invited to join with God in partnering in that redemption, by showing people what the kingdom of God looks like.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” (Luke 4:18-19)

🗨️ Kara asks: Have you ever considered your work as part of the redeeming work of Jesus? How does your work form part of that redemption?

🗨️ How can you do a little bit more in your workplace or through your work?

🗨️ In Jer 29:7, we read: “But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” How do you do this at work?

APPLICATION: Phil commented that the brokenness of work will not stop God from working through us to redeem our work, so go to work with God and join with him in his redeeming work in the world.

🗨️ HEAD – What have you learnt from the sermon and this study this week?

❤️ HEART – What has challenged you, personally?

👋 HANDS – What are you going to do about it this week?

³ <https://lifeatwork.org.au/content/redeeming-work-what-does-mean>

⁴ <https://twotenmag.com/magazine/issue-10/columns-and-departments/live-out-your-faith-at-work/>

⁵ <https://www.workship.com.au/>