

introduction

Genesis 2 paints a vivid picture of God as a gardener — shaping, planting, providing, and sustaining. From the beginning, there was meaningful work. God places humanity in the garden “to work it and take care of it” (2:15), showing that work is not a punishment or a necessary evil, but a reflection of God’s own creativity and care. Our discussion today will explore how work, in all its forms, is part of what it means to be human and to live in rhythm with our Maker. We’ll reflect on how God’s design dignifies every vocation and how our daily labor, when done in love and stewardship, can become an act of worship.



If money and time were no obstacle, what kind of work or project would you love to do — something that would make you feel fully alive?

read **Genesis 2:4-17 (NIV)**

⁴ This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

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, ⁶ but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. 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.

⁸ Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. ⁹ 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.

¹⁰ A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. ¹¹ The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. ¹² (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) ¹³ The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. ¹⁴ The

name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”

Take a few moments to reflect on the Scripture. Share some insights, questions, or points that strike you. Then read what follows.

the dignity of all work

Verse 8 tells us that “the Lord God planted a garden.” Before assigning humanity any task, God himself works with his hands — shaping, planting, forming. This image shatters the notion that some kinds of work are more spiritual, important, or dignified than others. In a culture that often elevates mental or status-driven work and undervalues physical or domestic labor, Genesis reminds us that all good work reflects God’s creative nature. Whether tending soil, caring for children or aging parents, repairing machinery, cooking, or managing information, each form of work carries inherent worth because it participates in God’s ongoing creation and care of the world.

This vision dignifies every vocation. It invites us to see our daily labors not as mere transactions or obligations, but as reflections of God’s own work in the world. God does not stand apart from the material — he engages it. In the same way, whenever we engage the material, social, or creative world with care, integrity, and love, we mirror his image. Our workplaces, homes, and communities become spaces where the sacred meets the ordinary.

“If God came into the world, what would he be like? For the ancient Greeks, he might have been a philosopher-king. That ancient Romans might have looked for a just and noble statesman. But how does the God of the Hebrews come into the world? As a carpenter...”

—Phillip Jensen and Tony Payne, *Eden and Beyond: Genesis 1-11*

discuss

1. When you think about “work,” what kinds of jobs or roles come to mind as most valuable or meaningful? What might shape those perceptions?
2. What helps you see dignity in the kind of work you do now – whether paid or unpaid?
3. Who have you known that models dignity in their everyday work, no matter what they do? What stands out to you about the way they approach it?

for flourishing and contribution

Verse 15 shows that in the earthly paradise, all the human needs were fully provided for. Derek Kidner compares the earthly paradise to a model of parental care: “The fledgling is sheltered but not smothered: on all sides discoveries and encounters await him to draw out his powers of discernment and choice, and there is ample nourishment for his aesthetic, physical, and spiritual appetites; further, there is a man’s work before him for body and mind (v. 15, 19).”¹

For our physical needs, there was abundant food (v. 9c); for our aesthetic needs, there was beauty that was “pleasing to the eye” (v. 9b); for our spiritual growth, there was a divine Word to bring about spiritual discernment (vv. 16-17), which is unique to humanity as animals receive no such Word. Kidner points out, humanity is capable of voluntary obedience to God. For our cultural and creative development, there was the *physical* work of tending to the garden (v. 15) and the *mental* stretching and understanding involved in the naming of the animals (v. 19).² Work, then, is not just about survival — it’s a way to participate in and respond to the richness of life God designed.

Furthermore, the placement of work in earthly paradise teaches that our labor is meant to extend beyond ourselves. Humans are called to tend and care for the garden, nurturing both its beauty and life, not merely extracting from it for personal gain. This points to the idea that meaningful work contributes to the flourishing of the broader world, helping others and

¹ Kidner, Derek. *Genesis*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, 2008.

² Keller, Tim. “Study 2: *Creation, work and rest*” What were we put in the world to do? Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2006.

stewarding creation. Work is therefore not a burden or punishment, but a channel for human fulfillment, creativity, and responsibility. By engaging in our vocations faithfully, we participate in the good that surrounds us, using our labor to honor life, beauty, and community — demonstrating that work is integral to the “good life” God intended.

discuss

4. **How does your work (or your studies, or your service) contribute to the good of others — even in small ways?**

5. **Where do you most feel the effects of frustration or futility in your work? What helps you find renewal, rest, or perspective when work feels heavy or draining?**

group application

Consider which of the views³ of work you tend to fall into:

View of Work	Description	Potential Distortions
“Work as my only identity”	Work defines who I am; accomplishments shape my self-worth and structure my life.	Can lead to workaholism, “careerism” ⁴ , deep dissatisfaction, neglect of rest, and ignoring other human needs (worship, relationships, aesthetics).
“Work is just a way to make a living”	Work is primarily a way to provide for life’s necessities; income and survival are the focus.	This view of work all by itself will rob work of its intrinsic value; can lead to cynicism, poor vocational choices, or seeing work as a mere burden rather than a blessing.
Work as Service/Sacrifice	Work is done for the benefit of others – family, community, society. <i>Example: many immigrants who come to the US and work horrendous hours in bad conditions for little pay do so for their children and families.</i>	This view all by itself will be inadequate motivation. Keller observes in the long run, this view could lead people to burn out or to take jobs that are too unadapted to one’s gifts (work-as-duty view).

³ These views are considered in light of Exodus 20:8-1 (Keller, Tim. “Study 2: *Creation, work and rest*” What were we put in the world to do? Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2006).

⁴ *Careerism*: a selfish concern only for one’s own career rather than for serving the common good

One of the key challenges in reframing our common view of work through a Biblical lens is balancing our hopes for work with Christian realism.⁵ Keller points out, work is not inherently bad, nor is it the only way to get to identity or fulfillment. Because of the Fall, work is cursed — it is affected by frustration and limitations ([Genesis 3:17](#)) — but it is not a curse. In this sense, all our labors will be somewhat frustrated, and we will never reach satisfaction in work. Sin makes work toilsome, but even under the curse, work will bear fruit “in toil you shall eat of it...” On the other hand, Keller emphasizes the need for humans to make every effort to discover work that satisfies our gifts and calling and produces value for others around us. To look for complete fulfillment, or *little* fulfillment, is missing the Biblical vision for work.

In light of these views and reflection on which view you tend to fall into, discuss together what you can do about it.

announcements

- **Saturday, October 25 | Manuscript Bible Study Training, 9 am-2:30 pm**
Learn from InterVarsity instructors on how to engage with God’s word personally, and in a small group context, so that times of study go beyond “just reading” the Bible.
redeemerws.com/biblestudy
- **Sunday, October 26 | Diaconate Open House, 1:15-2:00 pm**
As Elected Leader Nominations begin next month, learn about the mercy approach of our Diaconate and hear some deacons and deaconesses share on their roles and experience. A light lunch will be served.
redeemerws.com/openhouse
- **Sunday, November 2 | Church Family Meal, after both services**
Gather with your CG or sit with someone new for fellowship over a meal together.
redeemerws.com/familymeal

⁵ Keller, Tim. “Study 2: *Creation, work and rest*” What were we put in the world to do? Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2006.