

Work

Very good to see you guys. If you've got your bibles, go ahead and turn with me to **Genesis 2**. We've gotta do a little set-up first, but we'll get there eventually. First, if I can, I want to explain a little about this series we're starting this morning called *Adulthood*. If you spend much time on social media (which I'm guessing at least 1-2 of us in here do), you may have seen people start to use this hashtag, *#adulthood*, over the past year or two. And it's basically this noun (adult) that we've turned into a verb to describe, poke fun at, and sometimes vent about all the complexity of being a grown-up in today's world. I'll give you just a **few of my favorites** I've seen:

- [*I'm not broke but I'm acting broke so I don't become broke lol #adulthood*](#)
- [*Currently trying to figure out how to pay for grad school while still paying off undergrad loans and still being a happy human. #adulthood*](#)
- [*Bought a house and car before 12:00 today. When did I become responsible enough to do either of those. #adulthood*](#)
- [*when you go to the grocery store without your mom #adulthood \[then show meme\]*](#)
- [*EMOTIONAL cuz adulthood is hard.. graduating is scary/exciting/stressful... cuz NO IDEA WHAT IM DOING :///// and what the h am I gonna do without my mom*](#)

Now some of these are just plain funny. But I wonder if **beneath a lot of** our jokes and sarcasm on social media, there isn't an unspoken disillusionment with the idea of being an adult in today's world. I wonder if the reason we joke about it so much is because some of us are frustrated with, confused by, insecure about, or intimidated by the idea of adulthood. **I wonder if many of us actually feel a tad underprepared for the things that adulthood entails.** I know *I've* felt that at times. And in fact, what I've found in my time pastoring two different churches made up largely millennials, is that's pretty common: a lot of people in their most honest moments would say "I often feel woefully underprepared to function as an adult." So many of us have approached or reached adulthood and thought to ourselves "nobody told me how to do all this stuff." Or, "nobody told me it was going to be this difficult. Or confusing. Or boring." And **I wonder if a lot of our joking about that on social media is simply a way of coping with it.**

So in response to that, **what we thought we'd do for the next four weeks is try and discover what it means to be an adult in today's world.** So throughout this series, we're gonna spend time each week looking at a different aspects of adulthood—things like work, decision-making, finances—and understanding from the Scriptures how to think about those things and grow in them. And we're gonna be doing this largely by unpacking some of the opening pages of the book of Genesis. That sound good?

So up first **on the docket today** is the thing we spend the *vast majority* of our adult lives doing, and that's *working*. Unless your last name is Kardashian, you'll spend most of your life working. For **most of us it's around a third of our lives—that's around 90,000 hours in total** (and you thought 9-to-5 felt like it was taking forever). A third of our lives spent working. That's a lot. Now let me say up-front that when I say "work," while I certainly am including our 9-to-5 jobs—what we do for a paycheck—that's not *all* I'm talking about. I'm also talking about what you do on the side—your passion projects, the business you're trying to start, for those younger in the room I'm talking about school, and I'm talking about the very important non-paid work like that of stay-at-home moms. **When I talk about work, I'm talking about the jobs we're doing for pay, but I'm also talking about plenty of other things that we don't get paid for at**

all. And especially when you see it in those terms, we spend a *lot* of our adult lives working. And so it becomes all the more important that we understand how to think about our work through correct lenses.

Unfortunately, **the Church at large hasn't always done the best job unpacking this.** Often, it ends up getting communicated that the main purpose of your job is to 1) make plenty of money so you can give it to the church, and 2) just try your best to tell people about Jesus while you're there. Beyond that, people often don't think much about work as it relates to their relationship with God. But that's unfortunate. Because the bible actually has tons more to say about our work than those two things. **Work serves a much more comprehensive purpose, both practically and theologically, than we often give it credit for.** And I hope to help you see some of that today. So with that in mind, let's take a look at Genesis 2, starting in v. 1:

[1] Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

So this is the author's way of **summarizing everything that happened** in the last chapter, Genesis 1. There, we're given a play-by-play account of God creating and ordering the world. And here in v. 1 of chapter 2, we're told that God finished all of that. Now look at what it says next:

*[2] And on the seventh day God finished his **work** that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his **work** that he had done. [3] So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his **work** that he had done in creation.*

Notice that **it describes what God had been doing** up until this point in creating the world **as "work."** Now in the Hebrew, that means exactly what it sounds like: it's the word for workmanship, or craftsmanship, or business. The point the author is making is that **God, from the very beginning is at work.** One of the reasons that is significant is that it was strikingly different than other ways of thinking about the world at the time. If you're familiar with Greek or Roman mythology, you know that usually the gods spent the majority of their time *relaxing*, not *working*. Their default mode is that of leisure, sitting around relaxing—not working or laboring towards anything. That type of thing was considered to be too lowly of a task for them. **But our God, the God of the bible, spends his time working.** So here, it doesn't appear that work is a *bad* thing, because **it's something God himself gladly participates in from the very beginning: God works.** And one thing that Genesis 1 makes clear is that as human beings are made in the *image* of God—which would mean that we are called to work too. **We were meant to find our identity in being made in the image of God and being in relationship with him, and an important part of that is that we are called to work.**

Now, keep reading, v. 4:

*[4] These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens. [5] When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, **and there was no man to work the ground,** [6] and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground—*

So the earth has been created, but there's **no vegetation**, no greenery yet—and it says that's at least in part because "there was no *man to work the ground...*" So look at what God decides to do, v. 7:

[7] then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

So there's a **Hebrew play on words** here: the word for "man" is *adam*, and the word for "ground" is *adam-ah*. I tell you that mainly to show that there's this mutually beneficial relationship between humanity, and the ground. The ground benefits from humanity (in that it can now be gardened and cultivated), and humanity benefits from the ground (in that they have a purpose, a job to do). In other words **humanity is made for work, and work is made for humanity. Work is one vital part of who we are. It isn't a necessary evil, it's not just something we have to do so that we can have money to do all the more important things in life. Work in and of itself is good and necessary for us to do.** It's an important part of how we reflect God to the world around us, and it's part of how we make ourselves useful to the world.

This, I would argue, is why study after study has shown that one of the most at-risk groups for depression are **people who are retired**. Sociologists have started to realize that once people retire from their jobs, they often struggle to feel useful and purposeful, to find a source for the meaning they found in their work before they retired. I saw another article making the rounds on Facebook the other day that was talking about how retired women who babysit their grandchildren regularly tend to live longer. And part of it is because even after they retire from their "careers," they still see themselves as having a job to do, work to do. **I would argue all of this is because work—having a job to do—is a vital part of who we are.**

Now, let's keep reading in our passage, v. 8:

[8] And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.

So then God—still working—**plants a garden called Eden, and puts the man there**. Now, I want us to skip over a few verses just so we can get to v. 15, where it tells us specifically *why* God put the man there:

*[15] The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to **work** it and **keep** it.*

So God works—he plants a garden—and then puts Adam there to work too. Now, I don't know about you guys, but **that's different than how I grew up thinking about Eden**. When I was younger and heard about the story of Adam & Eve, I always pictured it as them lying down on a beach or something in paradise, sipping piña coladas, working on their tan—not *doing* very much of anything. I sort of imagined Eden like a Jimmy Buffet song. But that's not actually not at all the picture we get from the story. **According to the story, Adam is put in Eden to do what specifically? Work. He's given something to accomplish. He's given a job to do.**

So **what is that job exactly?** Well, it says it's to "**work**" the ground and "**keep**" the ground. "Keeping" the ground means to guard, to protect, or preserve. So part of our work too is to watch over things, to be managers and protectors and preservers. There's all sorts of things we could say about that. But for our purposes today, **I want to spend the bulk of our time on that other word—what it means to "work" the ground.** The word used *here* for "work" has at least a couple different meanings. **One of its**

meanings is to *cultivate*, or to *develop*, or *draw out something's potential*. The point being that work is taking the raw materials given to us and *making something out of them*. Rearranging the resources we have and turning them into something useful, meaningful and beautiful. This is true of any kind of work, no matter how white-collar or blue-collar it is:

- When a carpenter takes slabs of wood and saws and nails and a tape measure, and rearranges it all into a piece of furniture that is beautiful and useful, that's *cultivation*.
- When an accountant takes chaos of numbers and a knowledge of accounting and organizes it in such a way that it can be understood and analyzed and decisions can be made from it, that's *cultivation*.
- When a designer takes color palettes and shapes and typefaces and turns it into something that communicates a message and informs and inspires people, that's *cultivation*.
- When a janitor takes cleaning supplies and a broom and a mop and rearranges a dirty, messy space into a clean, organized space where people can work and function.
- When a manager takes people resources and a budget and office space and tasks to be completed, and arranges it into a functioning, productive workplace environment.
- When a counselor takes their understanding of a person's story and family history and helpful psychological theories and practices it and forms it into a plan to help a person better understand themselves and function in society.
- When a parent takes food and water and diapers and clothing and homework time and leverages all of it to raise and mature a tiny human being into a grown, functioning human being.

All of this is the work of cultivation. All good work, in one way or another, is this. All work, in some way, is doing what Adam was called to do back in Genesis—it's taking what we've been given and *cultivating* it, making it into something.

That's one part of what work is. But at the same time, this word for *work* is also used frequently to mean to "serve" or "worship." So work is cultivation, but **work is also service**. When we work, we are *servicing* other people and creation in general. **Work according to the bible is an opportunity to serve and bless the rest of creation.** I think this is one thing that we tend to forget when it comes to our work. Usually, we think of work as just something we do to make money, and if we're lucky, to feel personally fulfilled. And so if we don't feel like we're making enough money or don't feel very fulfilled at our current job, we start looking for a job somewhere else. Hear me out: if you currently don't like your job, it's probably a fine thing to look around for another one. Feel free to do that. But as you do that, **don't start to believe that just because you're not that *passionate* about your current job, that it's not *meaningful*. It still serves people, and therefore is worth doing and doing well.**

When you see your work like this, the question when choosing a vocation or a job isn't simply "what will make me the most money and personal fulfillment?" Instead, it becomes "how, with the resources and abilities and opportunities I've been given, can I be of greatest service to other people?" Now that's quite a different question, isn't it? Can you imagine if everyone saw their job this way? Can you imagine how much better the world would be? Can you imagine what would happen if people who worked at the DMV saw their job as existing to *serve people*? Can you imagine how great that would be for everybody? (If you're here and you work for the DMV, I'm sure you're great. You should help the rest of your coworkers be more like you). But seriously, **can you imagine the difference in our tone and attitude and posture if we started thinking and operating as if our work exists to serve others?** That'd have the potential to be a game-changer for the world, wouldn't it?

Now, **if we take those two** things: the idea of cultivation and the idea of service, and we **join them together**, what do we get? I think we get something like this, from author and pastor Tim Keller. This is how he defines work is:

[Work is] rearranging the raw material of God's creation in such a way that it helps the world in general, and people in particular, thrive and flourish.

And all of that is **a beautiful task to be given**. Work, at the beginning of the bible, is a *blessing*. I hear people say sometimes, usually after a hard or frustrating day of work, that “work is the curse.” Ever heard anybody say something like that? Well according to the bible, that’s not the case. Work later is *cursed*—we’ll talk about that in a second. But **work isn’t a curse. Work is actually a blessing. It’s a central piece of our humanity, it’s how we make ourselves useful to the world and other people, it’s something that God gives us to do back in the very beginning, for our good and for the good of those around us.** And that means that we should see it as such. Work isn’t just something we have to do to put money in our pockets. We shouldn’t just see it as a necessary evil so that we can survive and participate in the more important, more exciting parts of life. Work is far more important and far more beautiful than that.

Some of you, **upon hearing that**, are like “yeah that sounds great, but **you haven’t seen where I work**. You haven’t seen my boss, my coworkers, the stuff I have to put up with. You haven’t seen the pointless tasks I have to complete on a daily basis.” Well, that’s where **Genesis 3** comes in. A lot of you guys are probably familiar with the story, but **there’s also a tree in this garden with Adam and Eve that he tells them not to eat from. They choose to ignore that advice, and eat from the tree, and that’s when things start to get a whole lot worse.** In Genesis 3, God actually describes part of *what* gets worse as a result of this decision they make. Take a look with me at it, starting in the second half of v. 17:

[17b] 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.”

Now—pay attention here—one of the first consequences of sin entering the story is that **what is cursed?** Adam’s **work**. **According to these verses, one of the most immediate, direct effects of the Fall is that our relationship to work gets a lot more difficult.** God says that because of what happened, the ground will now bring forth “thorn and thistles”—meaning that our work will now produce something much different than what we want it to produce. He also says that by the “sweat of your brow you shall eat bread”—meaning that even when the ground produces what it’s supposed to, it will only do so after a lot of frustration and toil and extensive effort.

Put another way, **work is now worse than it should be because of sin.** Work for us today is no longer just as simple working the ground and keeping it. No longer just cultivation and service. Because of sin, it’s now fatigue and burn-out and frustration and red tape and inefficiency and workplace inequality. It’s frustrating bosses and lazy co-workers that don’t want to do their job and therefore make your job harder. In some cases, it’s elbow-throwing and backstabbing and gossiping behind people’s back. ~~And all that is if you’re lucky enough to get a job. Many of us grew up hearing “you can be anything you want to be,” “do anything you want to do,” and then were surprised to find out that’s not exactly an accurate~~

description of the job market these days. As Chris Rock said in his latest Netflix special: “it’s more like you can be anything you’re *good at, if they’re hiring*. And even then, it helps to know somebody.” We see the curse show up in a dozen different ways, that **work is now far more complicated and far less enjoyable that God intended for it to be in the beginning. No matter how badly we want it to, work simply will not be for us what we want it to be.** It always frustrates us, infuriates us, annoys us, or makes us want to quit. **Ever since the Fall, we’ve been wanting work to give us something that it just can’t seem to give us.**

And we all **respond to this in different ways**. For some people, **the response is to become weekend warriors**. The motto becomes “work sucks, so let’s just suffer through it to get to paychecks, weekends, vacations, and retirement.” All of our work just becomes putting our head down and white-knuckling it to every Friday at five o’clock. But good gosh, what a cynical, miserable way to spend a *third of your life*. Others of us respond by going on **one perpetual hunt for a job** that won’t have all the same problems as our current one. We spend half of our time *at work*, combing the internet for somewhere *else to work*. Maybe even looking for a different *career* that won’t have the same problems as ours now. And there’s nothing wrong with changing jobs or careers, but if you’re looking for a job or a career that is exempt from the effects of sin on the world, you’re gonna be looking for a while. For others of us, **we try to just pretend that the Fall never happened**. Instead of living for the weekend or jumping from job to job, we just work as hard as we can to get all the satisfaction and purpose out of the job we have. This is what leads many people to becoming workaholics. The belief at work there is that “as soon as I get this next promotion, close this next deal, get this next raise—as soon as that happens, work will finally become for me everything it is supposed to be. I’ll finally be happy, fulfilled.” And we keep operating on that mindset, but at the same time never quite get to that magical point. And **even for the few of us that love our jobs** and are doing exactly what we want to do, there are still headaches—slow months, shifts in the market, frustrating coworkers, clients that don’t want to pay their invoices. Even our ideal jobs are riddled with constant difficulties. That’s the reality of the so-called “curse.”

But track with me here—**what if that’s not all a bad thing?** What if the reality that we never quite get the identity we want from our work is a blessing, *as well as* a curse? **Is it possible that God makes work frustrating in part so that in that frustration we might realize that work can’t provide that for us?** Is it possible that the difficulty of our work was meant to serve as a constant reminder that life is about *more* than work? Is it possible that every so-called thorn and thistle we encounter is meant to call out to us that *work is not the purpose of life?* That work *can not be where the whole of our identity is found*. It’s important, yes. Valuable, yes. But **it can not be the thing that life is all about**. It wasn’t meant to be.

Remember, in the beginning **the way it was supposed to work** was Adam & Eve would get their identity from being image-bearers of God, from walking in close-knit, perfect relationship with him. But part of what happened upon that first bite of fruit from the tree is that they *rejected* that identity. **They and we struck out on our own, choosing autonomy from God rather than relationship with him. We have rejected the identity we were meant for. Which means that we’re now left needing to find it somewhere else.** We now experience what we might call an identity *vacuum*. Something else now has to become for us what God was supposed to provide. And there’s no end to the places we’ll try to get it from. Family, romantic relationships, political affiliation, sex...but a perennial favorite is to try and find it in our *work*. **We now often want our work to give us what we were always meant to have in God himself.**

And here's how you know you've done this: your sense of self-worth rises and falls with your job situation. If you're at a job you love, you're on top of the world. If you're at a job you hate, you feel like there's no way you can be happy at all. And it's not just "yeah I feel like my job isn't a great fit for me, so I'm looking around for something else." It's "I can not be a content human being as long as I have *this* job." **That's how you know you've made your job your identity. Trying to find our identity in work leads us to either worship work or despise work, depending on how successfully we think its applying that identity for us.**

And **if work was not frustrating**—if the work of cultivation and service just came completely naturally and without hindrance or frustration, we might look to work to be the entirety of our identity, and then be foolish enough to think that we had found it. But instead, we live with these constant frustrations and hangups with our work that will be there in one way or another until the new heavens and new earth. But **it's a frustration that seen correctly, points us to something far greater than work.** In the words of C.S. Lewis, "*if I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world.*"

What we ultimately need is not another job or another promotion or a stress-free workplace. While those things would be nice, they will never fix the problem. Because **what we actually need is reconciliation with the God who gives us an identity far better the one from our work.** We need a way to return back to that identity. And reconciliation is precisely what Jesus came to provide. Romans 5 says this:

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

What Jesus accomplished was what we all needed—reconciliation with God. He gives us a way to return to that relationship, that oneness with God we all need. **And through that, he gives us a way back to the identity we were always meant for. One of the things we've been given through Jesus is access to an identity far greater than our work.**

And **when your identity is found there, work** can just be what it is: **a meaningful, beautiful way to reflect our identity as image-bearers of God. It doesn't have to be the source of your identity. You don't need it to be.** This means that you can enjoy great days at work, and endure awful days at work. It means that you can have a job that you *really* like, and also be fine with a job you *barely* like. You can have the best job in the world and it not make you any *more* of a person, and have the worst job in the world and not be any *less* of a person.

Listen, I know there's **a lot of talk these days about pursuing your dream**, finding your dream job, starting that dream business, climbing the ladder in that dream career—we're real big on all that stuff here in America. And sometimes we baptize stuff like that all in religious language, something like "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." But a lot of people forget the context of that verse. Paul there is writing from prison, sitting in abject poverty, wasting away and out of *that place* he says "I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.* **Do you know what's ten times harder than pursuing a dream or chasing after a career? Learning the art of being content in all circumstances, high or low, good job or bad job, good pay or crap**

~~pay—and learning how to do it all with purpose and passion because you do not need your job to be everything to you.~~ That is every bit a reflection of the beauty of the gospel as pursuing a dream, if not more so.

So if you're a follower of Jesus, **this week** when you're sitting at your desk, or your cubicle, or in your breakroom—and you're thinking to yourself, "I hate my job," don't forget as you say that that the job that you hate is still cultivation, it's still a way to serve and love people, *and* therefore is still worth doing well. **And as you're doing the job you hate, let it serve as a reminder to celebrate having a much greater identity than your that job.** And if you're at work this week, and you're thinking "this is amazing that I get to this for a living," **let it serve as a reminder that as good as that is, it pales in comparison to the identity given to you through the cross of Jesus. Followers of Jesus should be some of the best employees, the best workers ever, because we have ceased needing work to provide something that it simply cannot provide.** Which enables us to cultivate and serve freely, as a reflection of our God who is always at work.

Let's pray.