

As 7 persons of short stature have said, “Heigh-ho, heigh-ho, it’s off to work we go.”<sup>1</sup> Most all of humanity heads off to work, usually at least 5 days a week, 8 hours a day or so. Often more. The average person spends one third of their waking hours at work. Therefore, its fairly important to conceive of our work rightly.

Your work matters. Historically too often people have thought that so-called sacred work is more important than so-called secular work. All of life is sacred. In God’s mind there is no clergy/laity distinction Luther: “Therefore I advise no one to enter any religious order or the priesthood, indeed, I advise everyone against it – unless he is forearmed with this knowledge and understands that the works of monks and priests, however holy and arduous they may be, do not differ one whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic laborer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks, but that all works are measured before God by faith alone.”<sup>2</sup>

Christians in the workplace are not merely chaplains, not merely workplace missionary, not merely a funnel for funds. We often limit our conversations about faith and the workplace to just evangelism, excellence and ethics. Share the gospel, do good work, do the right things. Those are good! But there is more to the story.

I am so glad you are here. I hope you’ll come to S.S., 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday night, and Midweek. But even if you do all that, that’s at absolute most 8 hours a week. What about the other 160? If Jesus is only a part of your church life and not your majority life, we have a problem. Then, consider your work week. How much time do you spend reading the Word and praying? I hope about 30 min a day. What about the other 16 hours? We want you to live all of life for Christ.<sup>3</sup>

First, what is work? Let me share three definitions, all saying the same thing, put a bit differently: Keller: “Rearranging the raw materials of a particular domain to draw out its potential for the flourishing of everyone.”<sup>4</sup> / Stott: the expenditure of energy (manual or mental or both) in the service of others, which brings fulfilment to the worker, benefit to the

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<sup>1</sup> Larry Morey, *The Dwarf’s Marching Song* 1938.

<sup>2</sup> Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the church in Selected Writings of Martin Luther*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 430.

<sup>3</sup> “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’” Abraham Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 488; Walt Mueller writes, “We are to represent Christ as His kingdom ambassadors, living out His kingdom priorities and agenda every minute of every day and in every area of life.” *Student Guide Culture* 55.

<sup>4</sup> Keller, “Work” sermon given at Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, NY, July 7, 1996.

community, and glory to God.<sup>5</sup> Crouch: Work is the fruitful transformation of the world through human effort and skill, in ways that serve our shared human needs and give glory to God.<sup>6</sup>

**I. Creation: The Spread of Shalom.** We gotta get the story right. 4 chapter gospel. / Not Gen 3-Rev 20 / In Gen 1, God created good people in a good world. There was peace – or the thicker Hebrew word is shalom. Hugh Whelchel, who has helped me greatly on this topic, defines it this way: “Shalom is flourishing in every dimension, physical, psychological, and spiritual. It denotes a right relationship with God, with others, and with God’s good creation. It is the way God intended things to be when he created the universe.”<sup>7</sup> God said it was good, it was good, it was very good.

Turn to the first page of the Bible. **1:2.** Without form and void. For the test of the chapter God proceeds to fill and to form the world, then he creates humanity to take over for him. **1:28.** God's blueprint for humanity. We are to fill and to form. Mirror and Mimic our Maker. Made to make. Here we have God’s first co-workers. Multiplication and dominion. Make babies make culture. Fill and form.

Notice the commands, five of them: be fruitful, multiply, fill, subdue, and have dominion. We are doing pretty well here with the first three. We filling this place up. 17 pregnant members. The last two verbs are subdue and rule. We are to subdue and rule the world on God’s behalf. The word “subdue” (*kabash*)<sup>8</sup> means to bring under one’s control for one’s advantage. To harness the earth’s potential and use its resources for the benefit of someone.<sup>9</sup> In this case, to make the earth useful for humanity’s benefit and enjoyment. We increase flourishing across God’s new creation.<sup>10</sup> We spread shalom.

The word for “rule” (*radah*) means to reign or have dominion. Kingly language. Not like a tyrant or despot, but like a caring parent. Ruling the world on God’s behalf, as God’s representative. We reign in a manner that demonstrates his lordship over all creation.<sup>11</sup> One scholar translates

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<sup>5</sup> Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Baingstoke, England: Marshalls, 1984), 162.

<sup>6</sup> (Tech-Wise Family 83). D. James Kennedy: “We are to take all the potentialities of this world, all of its spheres and institutions, and bring them all to the glory of God. We are to use this world to the glory of God. We are to bring it and surrender it at the foot of the Cross. In every aspect of the world, we are to bring glory to God and this means in all of the institutions of the world.” D. James Kennedy, *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born?* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1994), 240.

<sup>7</sup> *Reweaving Shalom*, 26-27.

<sup>8</sup> Dempster: “Wherever it occurs in the bible, ‘it always means an action in which man reduces something to his use thorgh the application of force.’” *Dominion*, 60.

<sup>9</sup> *Good to be a Man*, 22.

<sup>10</sup> Whelchel, *Reweaving Shalom*, 26.

<sup>11</sup> Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 46.

rule "to actively partner with God in taking the world somewhere."<sup>12</sup> This is what we are made for. We multiply, subdue and rule under the leadership of God. Drawing out the world's potential and repurposing for the glory of God and the good of people. We draw out the potential the Creator has packed in. We make, we order, we beautify, and benefit. We fruitfully order the world on behalf of God.

**2:15** Rule and subdue, work (*abad*) and keep (*shamar*). Humanity is to cultivate the earth. Build culture.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, this word for "work" is used all over the Hebrew Bible for worship. Work is worship. Same word. So, Bruce Ashford writes, "Humanity's mission, therefore, was to spread God's glory across the face of the earth by building societies of worshipers who, in turn, produced cultures that honored God."<sup>14</sup> You hear the word "cult" in "culture." Cultic: relating to worship and religious rites.

Work is worship to God and service to others. This all makes sense especially when we remember that the Garden was the first sacred space. It was a Temple. The house of God. So, Adam and Eve should have had kids, trained them up, and subdued the world for God. Eden was the inhabitable space and they were to expand the boundaries of Eden further and further out until ultimately the glory of God covers the earth as the waters cover the sea. Subdue and rule. They were to partner with God in subduing the remaining chaos within creation.

Here we have the fundamental commission of humanity, often called the "Cultural Mandate". David Hegeman defines culture as "the divine calling of mankind to transform the earth from its initial, natural state to a glorious network of gardens and cities spread out across the whole face of the globe."<sup>15</sup> Reformed Theologian Herman Bavinck puts it this way: "We can say that culture in its broadest sense is the purpose for which God created man after his image."<sup>16</sup> Work – which is the blueprint here - is culture building and culture maintaining.

Listen to how Nancy Pearcey puts it: "The first phrase 'be fruitful and multiply,' means to develop the *social* world: build families, churches, schools, cities, governments, laws. The second phrase, 'subdue the earth,' means to harness the *natural* world: plant crops, build bridges, design computers, and compose music. This passage is sometimes called the Cultural Mandate because it tells us that our original purpose was to create cultures, build civilizations—

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<sup>12</sup> *Garden City* 41; "And we beasts remember, even if Dwarfs forget, that Narnia was never right except when a son of Adam was King." *Prince Caspian*, 69

<sup>13</sup> *Garden City*, 58.

<sup>14</sup> Ashford, *Every Square Inch*, 127.

<sup>15</sup> David Bruce Hegeman, *Plowing in Hope* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1999), 95.

<sup>16</sup> *Our Reasonable Faith*

nothing less.”<sup>17</sup> This is not just farming. It begins there, but moves to cities. In fact, at the end of the Book, what do we see? A city coming down out of heaven. The narrative moves from Garden to City. So we participate by developing the untamed garden to be a cultivated city.

We steward the world in such a way that everyone and everything flourishes, leading everything to worship their Creator.<sup>18</sup> Humanity was called to continue God’s creative work. That is why J.R.R. Tolkien called humanity “sub-creators.” That’s what it means to be made in the image of God. This is what it means to work.

We take dirt, plants, wildlife, ideas, sounds, minerals and move the chaos to culture. We invent transportation, and fix transportation, build buildings, make music, produce technology, do science, write and uphold law, write books, study nature, weld metal, run fiber, reset bones, invent new gadgets, develop and manage spreadsheets, and meeting times, and facility use, and blood pressure, and medicine, and math facts, and catechisms, and diapers, and insurance, and art - Michelangelo said “every block of marble has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it. I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free,”<sup>19</sup> music, business, education – all for God’s glory and the good of others. We love God and serve neighbors through our work. We are not just collecting paychecks.

Build culture, develop civilization, nurture the world. They started in the Garden of Eden, which was paradise. But the rest of the world was not yet hospitable. Eden was the ready-made, but the rest of the world would be new construction. This is *all pre-Fall*. This is before sin had entered the world. Work is good. Stuart Briscoe said, “Remember that Paradise wasn’t a vacation – it was a vocation.”<sup>20</sup> / **Jer 29:4-7** (shalom) / Steward the world and steward your gifts in the world in such a way that everyone and everything flourishes and points to the Creator. We are to spread *shalom* through the work of your hands.

**II. Fall: Shalom Shattered** – In a post Genesis 3 world, all is East of Eden. Everything is tainted with sin, including our work. **Gen 3:17-19**. Those made to cultivate the earth will fertilize the earth. They were to subdue the dirt but because of their rebelling will be subdued by dirt – 6’ under. BCP defines sin this way: “the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation.” Asher: that’s not how it’s supposed to be. There are now four massive fractures from the Fall: god, self, others, creation. Nothing works like it should. Fallen world factor: every project requires three trips to Lowes.

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<sup>17</sup> Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 47; see also Hegeman, *Plowing in Hope*, 45; Richard J. Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 35; Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 44-45; Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 44-45.

<sup>18</sup> Tyson, *Kingdom Vision*, 166.

<sup>19</sup> Tyson, *Kingdom Vision*, 222.

<sup>20</sup> Stuart Briscoe, *Choices for a Lifetime* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1995), 142.

Though sin reigned, God would not let his world or his people go. So the prophets promised of a new day, a new age, and new covenant when the Messiah King would come and restore his people and restore shalom. Here is how Neal Plantinga describes the way the prophets promised a new age: “They dreamed of a new age in which crookedness would be straightened out, rough places made plain. The foolish would be made wise, and the wise, humble. They dreamed of a time when the deserts would flower, the mountains would stream with red wine, a time when weeping would be heard no more, and when people could sleep without weapons on their laps. People could work in peace, their work having meaning and point. A wolf could lie down with a lamb, the wolf cured of all carnivorous appetite. All nature would be fruitful, benign, and filled with wonder upon wonder; all humans would be knit together in brotherhood and sisterhood; and all nature and all humans would look to God, walk with God, lean toward God, and delight in God, their shouts of joy and recognition welling up from valleys and crags, from women in streets and from men on ships. The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Old Testament prophets called shalom. We call it peace, but it means far more than mere peace of mind or cease-fire among enemies. In the Bible shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight—a rich state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be.”<sup>21</sup>

**III. Redemption: Reweaving Shalom** – You ever notice how God loves “re” words: redemption, renew, repent, restore, resurrection, reconciliation, repent, and regeneration.<sup>22</sup> God’s plan in Christ is a redemption plan. Salvation is not escape *from* the world but the restoration *of* it. Christ, as the last Adam and second man, launches a new humanity who is called to take up the human project and brings it to its intended goal. Having been put right, we now become part of God’s plan to put the whole world right.<sup>23</sup>

So, what does this mean for us? God uses the work of our hands to reweave shalom, which is the title of a great book by Hugh Whechel.. As Walter Bruegemann puts it, “Shalom is not only an incredible gift; it is a most demanding mission.” Through our work, we repair, renew, restore the work of God.<sup>24</sup>

Humanity was created to rule on God’s behalf. Jesus is restoring God’s reign on earth. We are agents of God’s reign, on earth as in heaven. Rom 5:17: “For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.” We are reweaving shalom through our work. We actively partner with God to take the world

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<sup>21</sup> Plantinga, 10.

<sup>22</sup> Stonestreet and Smith, *Restoring All Things*, 17.

<sup>23</sup> Wright, *The Day the Revolution*

<sup>24</sup> T.M. Moore; “The story that holds together the Gospels and Paul might be summarized like this: the God of Israel acted decisively in the person of Jesus to restore God’s rule and reconcile the whole world to himself.” *Jesus I Have Loved* 9.

somewhere. Reshape the world into an environment for people to live as God intended. Ok, so what? 4 applications:

First, elevate your view of work. You are a sub-creator. Subduing and ruling for God. It may be too much in a fallen world to replace TGIF with TGIM. But, your work matters to God and matters in his world. Get a God-sized perspective. Zoom out. A story is told of a time in the middle ages when one of the great European cathedrals was being built. A visitor strolled through and was asking the various workers about their labor. The stonemason talked about raising a plumb wall. The glass worker talked about the details of a leaded glass window. The carpenter spoke about the wooden frame used to support the building. Then he saw a peasant woman sweeping up trash and he asked her what she was up to and she said, “I am building a cathedral for the glory of God.”<sup>25</sup> What are you doing? Cutting stone. What are you doing? Earning a paycheck. What are you doing? Building a cathedral for the glory of God.

*Second*, view your work as one of the main ways to love your neighbor. The poet Kahlil Gibran says, “Work is love made visible.”<sup>26</sup> Luther was really good here. The doctrine of vocation. All work matters. He said, “The maid who sweeps her kitchen is doing the will of God just as much as the monk who prays—not because she may sing a Christian hymn as she sweeps but because God loves clean floors.”

Our vocations are the masks of God. He said that God himself milks the cow through the milkmaid. God works through human vocations to care for his creation. Use coffee for an example: farmers, harvesters, cleaners, truck drivers, pilots, grocery stores, clerks, coffee makers – so I can enjoy a cup of coffee to the glory of God. Work is an opportunity to serve others. Work is an act of love.

*Third*, work with excellence. Luther: “The Christian shoemaker does his Christian duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes.” In her essay called “Why Work,” Dorothy Sayers writes, “No crooked table legs or ill-fitting drawers ever, I dare swear, came out of the carpenter’s shop at Nazareth. Nor, if they did, could anyone believe that they were made by the same hand that made heaven and earth. No piety in the worker will compensate for work that is not true to itself; for any work that is untrue to its own technique is a living lie.”<sup>27</sup>

Christians ought to be the best workers. Col 3:23 – working with all our heart as unto the Lord and not for people. You’ve heard “jack of all trades, master of none.” How about “jack of many trades, master of one.” Hone your craft and use your influence for the Kingdom of Christ. Prov 22:29: “Do you see someone skilled in their work? They will serve before kings; they will not serve before officials of low rank” (NIV). Cream rises.

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<sup>25</sup> Whechel, *How Then Should We Work*, 83.

<sup>26</sup> On Work

<sup>27</sup> <https://songlight-for-dawn.blogspot.com/2009/11/why-work-by-dorothy-l-sayers.html>

Dorothy Sayers said, “In nothing has the Church so lost Her hold on reality as in Her failure to understand and respect the secular vocation. She has allowed work and religion to become separate departments, and is astonished to find that, as a result, the secular work is turned to purely selfish and destructive ends, and that the greater part of the world’s intelligent workers have become irreligious, or at least, uninterested in religion. But is it astonishing? How can anyone remain interested in a religion that seems to have no concern with nine tenths of his life? The church’s approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him not to be drunk and disorderly on Sundays. What the Church should be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables.”<sup>28</sup>

*Fourth*, have a missional posture. Be on mission in the workplace. The first Adam is given a bride to help him multiply and rule. The Last Adam purchases a bride to help him multiply and rule. The Great Commission is a restatement of the Cultural mandate. Jesus and his bride are fulfilling the original mandate by filling earth with new images of God, who in turn spread the rule of King Jesus, as the temple expands. Col 1:6 the gospel is being fruitful and multiplying in the whole world.

See yourself as an informal missionary in the workplace. Sent by God as his ambassador. / You know the most fruitful evangelists in world history are – and the second is not even close? Moms. Countless thankless and too many unnoticed hours of prayers and pleading and teaching and catechizing and discipling. Most Christians come to faith before the age 18 and the main person God uses is Mom Mothers, your work is so significant.

Stay at home Moms, do you ever struggle internally when various applications ask for your occupation? Here’s a suggestion from Tony Campolo: I am socializing homo sapiens into the dominant values of the Judeo-Christian tradition so that they can become the eschatological change-agents God has designed them to be for all of eternity." Yes, you fold laundry, but you unfold children into responsible human beings and disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If your career path is still in your future or if you are considering a change, consider these 4 questions from John Stonestreet.<sup>29</sup> 1) What is good? Share, promote, protect and celebrate.<sup>30</sup> 2) What is missing? Creatively contribute. 3) What is evil? Oppose it. Stop it. 4) What is broken? Redeem it, fix it, restore it. Repair renew restore.

Pastor JD Greear notes that every Christian has two callings: honor God and serve others with your job, make disciples. So, what skill has God given you through which you can serve the common good? Where and how can you do it most strategically to advance the mission of God.

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<sup>28</sup> Dorothy Sayers, *Creed or Chaos?* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1974), 106.

<sup>29</sup> *Restoring All Things* Stonestreet, 25.

<sup>30</sup> Stonestreet and Smith, *Restoring All Things*, 25-26.

He says, “Whatever you’re good at, do it well for the glory of God, and do it somewhere strategic for the mission of God.”<sup>31</sup>

Listen to Frederick Buechner: “There are all different kinds of voices calling you to all different kinds of work, and the problem is to find out which is the voice of God rather than of Society, say, or the Superego, or Self-Interest. . . By and large a good rule for finding out is this: the kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work (a) that you need most to do and (b) that the world most needs to have done. If you really get a kick out of your work, you’ve presumably met requirement (a), but if your work is writing cigarette ads, the chances are you’ve missed requirement (b). On the other hand, if your work is being a doctor in a leper colony, you have probably met requirement (b), but if most of the time you’re bored or depressed by it, the chances are you have not only bypassed (a), but probably aren’t helping your patients much either. . . The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”<sup>32</sup>

Your calling is a combination of your gifting, your desires, and opportunity to do good. Gifts, desires, need. Discover your skills, develop them, then deploy them and you will be fulfilled, others benefitted, God glorified.

**IV. Restoration: Shalom Fully Restored.** Eschatology shapes ethics. What we are doing now matters for eternity. Whelchel says, “We reweave *shalom* within our spheres of influence by exercising stewardship, by subduing the earth and making it useful for the benefit and enjoyment of human beings. In other words, we bring about flourishing by obeying the cultural mandate. We move the world back to the way it should be when we carry out this mandate through our work.”<sup>33</sup> We give people a glimpse of shalom, a glimpse of how its supposed to be. We do work that honors God and serves the common good, extending God’s kingdom in he here and now.<sup>34</sup> On earth as in heaven.

And our work will last. Revelation 21 is a vision of the New Jerusalem: 21:24-26: “By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.” John is actually quoting from Isa 60, a vision of new creation that says the wealth of the nations will be brought in, the camels of Midian, gold and frankincense, sheep of Kedar, the ships from Tarshish, the timber from Lebanon. It seems like the best of human culture will be brought into the new world.

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<sup>31</sup> *Gaining by Losing*, 75.

<sup>32</sup> Frederick Buechner, “Vocation,” from *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 95; “I’d tell men and women in their midtwenties not to settle for a job or a profession or even a career. Seek a calling. Even if you don’t know what that means, seek it. If you’re following your calling, the fatigue will be easier to bear, the disappointments will be fuel, the high will be like nothing you’ve ever felt.” *Shoe Dog* 381-382

<sup>33</sup> Whelchel, *God’s Purpose in Creation*, 22.

<sup>34</sup> *Reweaving Shalom*, 27.

N.T. Wright says, “What you do in the present—by painting, preaching, singing, sewing, praying, teaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, loving your neighbor as yourself—will last into God’s future. These activities are not simply ways of making the present life a little less beastly, a little more bearable, until the day when we leave it behind altogether. They are part of what we may call building for God’s kingdom. They are also central to our mission of showing the world grace.”<sup>35</sup>

**Benediction 1 Cor 15:58**

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<sup>35</sup> *Surprised by Hope*