

FAITH & WORK

TRAINING FOR THE EVERYDAY



Faith and Work: Empowered for Risk

July 16, 2023

Toby Kirth

Genesis 1:26-28

From Genesis Chapter 1: 26 - 28, "Then God said, Let us make man in our image after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God, he created him; male and female, he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish, of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." And from Genesis 2:15, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it." This is the word of the Lord. You can be seated.

Well, like I mentioned, I have the privilege of introducing our guest speaker this morning. Our guest preacher, Pastor Toby is a dear friend of mine. I'm going to introduce him in a second, and I've known him for a few years. When me and Sarah, my wife, we helped plant a church in San Francisco, Pastor Toby was one of the first people that was helpful to us in our influence. And by the way, as it relates to faith and work, Toby has been all over the place in regards to this subject. One, he's lived all over the country. He's originally from the San Diego area. He lives in the San Francisco Bay area. He's the pastor of a church called Christchurch in the inner Richmond district of the city. And as you know, San Francisco is very similar to the Seattle region in regards to faith and work and those conversations that have taken place in terms of being culturally upstream.

Pastor Toby's worked for a number of church planning organizations. He's worked alongside Stadia Church Planning. He's worked alongside Acts 29. He's helped out a Redeemer City to City, which is a network that Redeemer Presbyterian started connecting church to work and

discipleship. He was the chaplain at Sovereign Capital, which is a faith-based venture capitalist firm. And he's worked alongside Transform the Bay for Christ, which is an organization that partners churches and the workplace and people like you to the greater church area to see how we can influence the region for Jesus. So he's done a lot. So would you please join me in welcoming Pastor Toby Kirth to the stage.

Thank you.

Yeah. Can I pray for you, bother? Lord, we want to pray for Pastor Toby. Lord, there's many, many people here that have been searching and wondering, how do I apply the good news that Jesus to what I do and do well. The motivation that they seek may be found. And so, Lord God, I pray that your spirit would be on Pastor as he preaches. I pray that the words coming from his page would be influential. And I pray that our hearts and minds are ready for the word he is going give us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Thank you, Eddie. Well, it's so great to be here. We definitely miss Eddie and Sarah in San Francisco, but so grateful to see the work they're doing here. We planted a church in 2009. I was a lead pastor on it, but so much of what we learned over the years is so tied to things in and around Seattle. I did Soma School with Jeff Vanderstelt years back, and we implemented missional communities and just have learned and grown a ton over the years. And so I am grateful for the witness of this church and that you guys are continuing to go forward in the Seattle area. And it's just so encouraging to be here.

I got to spend time with some of your elders yesterday and just quality people and a lot of fun to go out on the lake. And so I used to say, and I still probably will say, that no city on the planet has nature and the beauty of nature so incorporated into the city as San Francisco. That lake is shaking my confidence a little bit, but anyway, it was a great time to have it.

I have been in full-time vocational ministry for about 15 years. Prior to that I was in the marketplace in the science and engineering, a bit of consulting kind of world. I also had a brief stint trying to do a PhD in early American history. But through it all I have struggled, along with many of you probably, in figuring out how do I incorporate what I believe about who God is and what he's called me to do in the marketplace. And as I've stepped into vocational ministry, I feel like actually my burden for that has increased, if anything. Because now I don't just have a responsibility of helping myself learn how to integrate faith into work and let God drive everything I do, but I have the responsibility to try to help the men and women in our congregation, many of whom are in very challenging workplace situations, just really figure out what does it look like to integrate faith into work.

And so the Transforming the Bay Organization that I work with that Eddie mentioned was started by Pat Gelsinger, who's now the CEO of Intel. There's a whole lot of marketplace leaders that are doing incredible work. I'd say prior to Covid, gospel work at its greatest level, both outreach and discipleship was probably most powerfully happening in the marketplace through employee resource groups, through different kinds of outreaches and engagements. I think

given the fact that we spend the majority of our waking hours every week at work, it's natural to think that that's going to be a primary place of discipleship and a primary place of the gospel going forward and a primary place to use our gifts.

I had early on a mentor when I was sorting through this, a very successful guy in the marketplace, entrepreneur. I was asking him, so what does the church get wrong on this? Like, what would be more helpful? And he was in his like late fifties at this point in time. He just said, you know, I think in my early twenties I had pastors trying to help me, and they would give me things like, well, you have to have priorities, you know, first your family, then church, then work or however you want to order that list. And he said it left me feeling like on any given week I couldn't give enough to any one of those areas. And he said, the reality is you could work 80 hours this week and it could be glorifying and honoring to God. You can work 80 hours next week and it could be complete idolatry. How do you know the difference?

Well, community, church, people that can speak into your life, a relationship with God, but I also believe you need to have a deep theological framework to help you. So today we're going to work through that. We're going to talk about risk. We're going to talk about how we understand this thing called the creation mandate in scripture. I'm going to do a longer introduction than I would normally do to kind of lay some of the groundwork for that. I'm going to throw a lot at you because my goal today is just to get as many conversations going at Doxa as possible. So please join us in the afternoon. If anything is more interesting, we'll get into more details. So I'm going to do a bit of a fire hose today, but I trust and I hope that God will use it to start stimulating your imagination, and your creativity, and a greater sense of call and purpose for what you're doing in your vocations.

Well, pray with me and we'll dive in here. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are with us. We thank you that you lead us and guide us in all things. I pray, Lord, that if anyone is here today exploring faith, that you would overwhelm them with a sense of your love, your grace, and your forgiveness that is only found in Christ. And I pray for those of us in here that trust in Christ, that you would revive our gratitude and dependence upon you in Christ. We can do nothing without you, but there's nothing we can't do with you if it's your call in our lives. So we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

The title I gave the message today is Empowered for Risk. It's going to be rooted in the creation mandate. But if we go all the way back to the beginning, we learn that we were created for risk. We were created for dependence upon God, even before the fall, before sin enters the world. No human being was designed to be omniscient, knowing everything. No human being was designed to be omnipotent, having all power to do everything. And so we were always going to be dependent upon God, always needing God's presence, always needing to depend on him, to wait on him, to follow his leading and guiding.

Now the fall and sin brings a lot of challenges into that. One of the ones I've had in my life a lot is a challenge with patience; with understanding when I'm supposed to wait on God, and when I'm supposed to charge ahead. And what I've come to learn over time is I'm only ever called to

charge ahead if God's with me. Here's a life lesson I learned that transformed into a spiritual lesson.

I learned this when I was 10 years old. My family had the opportunity to take a trip to Hawaii. My dad was a Navy pilot, so I actually was born in Honolulu. And so at the age of 10, I was going back for my first trip since I was really little, and I was excited to see all the places to go with the stories my parents had told me. Second thing, I was excited, my parents had told me these mythical tales about Hanauma Bay which was just tropical fish everywhere and you could snorkel right there with them. And I couldn't wait to see that.

But the adventure side of me as a 10 year old was super excited about something my dad called the toilet bowl. The toilet bowl was a natural lava rock foundation around the corner from Hanauma Bay. And the reason it was called the toilet bowl is when the ocean would surge in, it would swirl up in this circular pool and all kinds of fun as it's spinning you around. And then it would swirl back down like a toilet being flushed out the little drain and then out to sea. And my dad had told me, look, it can be really dangerous, so stay with me. I'll walk up there with you. I'll help you get in there safely, and you'll have a lot of fun.

The problem with me is I'm 10 years old and I see all the white water and I see all these people looking like they're having a blast. And I just take off running. I'm sure my dad's calling after me. I'm sure he is trying to get me but didn't matter. I was just charging ahead. I knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to get in that pool. Nothing could stop me from having fun right now. And so I get there, and you know, if the pool is at the edge of the stage, you know, my 10-year-old self just takes off from like right here and I'm just going to get in the middle of it and start my fun right now. Forget my dad.

So I jump in the middle of it, water swirling up, and I was having the time of my life for about two seconds. Because the water swirled up, threw me over the edge, and the edge was all these smooth rocks and I'm desperately like trying to grab ahold of something and I can't grab ahold of anything. And then I'm coming down and I'm learning very vividly why it's called the toilet bowl because I'm literally being flushed. So I'm coming around the edge of the bowl. I can't grab onto anything. And by God's grace, these two men stepped in, put their legs in front of the drain and held me. They couldn't pull me up, they could only hold me because the force of the water was so much. I learned later that that drain hole is razor sharp coral that goes out over razor sharp coral.

And when I was thinking about the story a few months back, I googled what was going on with the toilet bowl. It was closed down in 2011 because too many people had drowned or been seriously injured. So for me it was a life lesson that maybe my dad sometimes knows what he's talking about. But it was also, as I've thought about it more and more over the years, it's also been a spiritual lesson of I can embrace risk. I can go out there and do something, but it's foolish to do it without the presence of my heavenly Father. It's foolish to go out there and think that I can do, or should do, or can do, anything meaningful and great and wonderful without God guiding me, leading me, and empowering me.

But the great and wonderful thing is God created me, God created you, for risk. He created you to step out. But he created you to step out in his presence with the power of His Holy Spirit, with the redeeming work of Jesus, so that you are fully empowered to embrace all kinds of stuff that will blow your mind and your imagination. But God wants you to stretch because that'll drive you into greater dependence upon him.

Risk is not intended to be this bravado, arrogance, hubris thing. Risk is intended to drive you to do something that you believe God's called you to do. And you also believe you can only do if God is empowering you and you step into the full freedom of doing that. And so for me, this is the theological framework, and we will get into the creation mandate, but at the core, this is the theological framework for how I think we should understand faith and work. They're not separate, they're integrated. Faith is a part of all of my life, especially the place where I'm deploying all of my gifts in the marketplace and the majority of my waking hours of the week. I can find purpose. I can find incredible empowerment from God. I can find direction. I can find everything I need if God's present with me, and I promise you this, God wants to stretch you. God wants you to do things that you can only do because he's empowering you to do them, but he will empower you to do them. And there can be a discomfort in this thing, but it's also beautiful and wonderful.

So let's get back to the foundation here that I'm trying to lay, something that theologians call the creation mandate or the cultural mandate. And it goes all the way back to the story in Genesis, the scriptures we heard read earlier today. And there's this imagery of the garden of Eden as a microcosm of what the rest of the earth will be. Eden is this place of beauty and order and everything as it should be. And the rest of the earth is somewhat mysteriously described as disorder and chaos. Not sin yet, but still disorder and chaos, unbridled resources. And God tells Adam and Eve that they're to manage and till the garden. But God extends that call beyond the garden. He tells them that all the beauty and the order and everything they have in the garden with them, he is going to use them to co-create with him to spread the beauty and the order and his presence to the ends of the earth; that they will go, humanity will go and God will go with them.

We don't know what it would look like. This is complete speculation, but I had this image in my head almost of Adam and Eve standing on the edge of the garden with God beside them, and look behind him and see the beauty and the perfect harmony and order of the garden. And then God shows him the chaos that's out there, the unbridled resources. And he says, everything I've done back here, I'm going to teach you how to do out there and we're going to co-create, we're going to bring order to chaos. We're going to bring beauty, we're going to bring light. We're going to bring my very presence to the ends of the earth. And I'm going to do that with you.

There's a great article that T. David Gordon and Jeffrey Herbener wrote on the creation mandate and the Genesis story. I'll read you a quote from it and I can make this available to Eddie and the staff here if anyone's interested.

But they say this, "Regarding the human's creation in the image of God also suggests that the human would do some of the things God does. That is, if the Bible ended in Genesis 1:27, and we asked what we know about God, in whose image humans are made, the answer would be that God is a maker: He creates."

So, if I'm building a theology of God and understanding the doctrine of God up to Genesis 1:27, the greatest thing I know about him is he's a creator and he creates things that are awesome and beautiful and bring order to chaos. And then I would learn that as a human being, I'm an image bearer and he's called me to do work like his. And so if I building my anthropology off that theology or that doctrine of God, what would I say? What's humanity created to do-in God's image, reflecting him to create like he creates. With that in mind, listen to these words again that we heard read to us out of Genesis one and two.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female, he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Genesis 2:15, "The Lord took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and to keep it." Subdue, dominion, work it, keep it. Those are the foundational words that go into the creation mandate.

We're going to talk about those in a minute, but for now I want us to understand this is the call that's been extended to us. Sin and brokenness, our own, and the world's, make it really complicated. But that fundamental mandate to bring order to chaos, to bring beauty into the world, to co-create with God, those things are still in full force. You are called to co-create. You are called to bring order to chaos. Through your work, through your vocation, through your calling, God has called you into the marketplace to use all the gifts and abilities and resources he's given you for his glory and the benefit of humanity. Your intellect, your resources, everything you have as a gift from God-why did he give it to you? To bless you and to show his love for you. But he wired you the way you're wired. He gifted you the way you're gifted because he had a particular calling in mind for your life.

And God, through the power of the Holy Spirit and the redemption work of Jesus enables you to step into God's purposes for your life, to recognize that you have a sacred stewardship of all of those giftings and callings. They haven't been given to you by accident. To figure out how to deploy them is one of the greatest works that God gives you to do on earth. The primary idea I want to drive home today is this, that the Holy Spirit empowers you to embrace risk, and risk drives you into greater dependence upon God and the work of Christ and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. And the more you're driven to that, the greater you understand the creation mandate, and the more you understand how dependence upon God drives you, and you step back in and you're able to embrace more risk. It's this beautiful virtuous loop of stepping more and more into God's purposes for your life.

So long introduction, but we're going to do two things in more short order. First, we're going to look at how God creates and calls us to create like Him and to cultivate his creation. And secondly, we're going to look at the more we understand that the more we're able to step into this holy ambition, this risk with the presence of God, and we're able to embrace it more and step more fully into the freedom God has for us.

So first God creates. That's who he is. And then he calls us to co-create with him. And he gives us this sacred duty of cultivating creation. This is how we're to understand faith and work. It's part of God's call to bring order from chaos. You marshal all your gifting, all the resources, ultimately create human flourishing. We do it for God's glory and we do it for the benefit of humanity.

The late Tim Keller, a faithful and awesome preacher in New York City, defines this work as this, very simple but very beautiful, "Rearranging the raw materials of a particular domain to draw out its potential for the flourishing of everyone." You're marshaling resources for the glory of God and the benefit of humanity. And this kind of work requires risk. And risk, again, is supposed to be immediately associated with our dependence upon God.

I think one of the challenges is in our modern world, especially with all the digital devices and apps and things we have, is we have this illusion that we can control more than we actually can. Control's a myth. You're never in control. Again, you're not omniscient. You're not omnipotent. You can control your actions and you can control your pursuit of God, but you can't control the outcome. You can't control the variables.

But God's in control and God is good. And the more we learn that it's good for God to be fully in control and fully depend on him, the more we can step into the purposes of what he has in our life. If you try to control everything in your life, it'll certainly destroy your relationships, especially if you're a parent. And it'll also destroy, you know, stuff in the marketplace because you're not intended to control. You're intended to trust God who is in control.

There's a beautiful image here though about humanity being able to fight the chaos that is so unique when you compare it to all other ancient near Eastern literature. In the ancient near East, there's all kinds of creation narratives and mythologies and every single one of them has this in common. There are these divine beings, and the king is usually some kind of semi-divine being and they are in absolute control, and they have absolute power and access to everything. And then there are human beings who were created for a menial, meaningless, violent, and short existence. And those creation mythologies were written to tell you your purpose if you're an ordinary human being. Just put your head down, serve the king, and settle into a violent, oppressive and short life. But into that really demeaning and horrific way of view in the world, the genesis creation narrative comes where it doesn't just tell you as a human being, you're created for a meaningful existence, it tells you that you're created in the image of God. That God created the world for harmony and beauty and order, and that he has endowed you with dignity and with honor, and to share his call, to extend his call, to bring order to chaos. In all of

ancient near Eastern literature, you will look in vain for an ordinary human being that gets to fight the chaos.

But God says those are my champions. Those are my vice regents. Those are the ones that I'm going to empower and I'm going to fight it with them. And it's this beautiful thing that tells us of the incredible dignity and sacred stewardship that God has given us over all creation. But this isn't just lofty and grand things. It's awesome when people work for companies that are shaping the world, but this is every lawful vocation. God uses all the callings of everyone to carry forth the world in the way it is. God cares for humanity through every vocation. And oftentimes those vocations that are sometimes the most out of sight or seemingly the most menial are the most essential to anyone.

If you've ever been in the south of France...a number of years ago when my parents were visiting, there was a trash strike. And the whole of the south of France never gave one word to how significant trash collection was weekly in their neighborhood until for weeks at a time their streets were piled up with trash and their appreciation of their local trash collector went through the roof. They recognized how essential they are to literally bringing order to chaos.

There is no meaningless vocation. Every vocation carries forth God's purposes. All the way back in the 16th century reformer Martin Luther said this, "Every occupation has its own honor before God. Ordinary work is a divine vocation or calling. In our daily work no matter how important or mundane we serve God by serving the neighbor and we also participate in God's ongoing providence for the human race." God's providence is worked out through his people.

So what does that look like for you? We're to pursue God in prayer. We're to pursue God in all the relationships he's given us so people can speak into our lives, and then we learn to depend upon God more and we step out, and we embrace risk and we believe God is who he says he is. It's almost as if, an entrepreneurs do this, but every vocation does this to an extent-we take stock of all the resources that God's given us and we say, you know, give this to me Lord, or thank you Lord for giving this to me; I want to make something happen with it. I want to step out and give my whole self to it.

And some of this is common sense. As I mentioned before, my dad was a Navy pilot and some of the earliest lessons I remember hearing from him, sometimes somewhat sternly, were not to give a half-hearted effort to anything you do. Although he didn't use those words exactly. He was a Navy man. But this is what God was calling Adam and Eve to back in Genesis one and two: to look at the expanse of the earth, to look at the unbridled resource, to look at the chaos and to step into that, to bring order for the benefit of humanity.

Makoto Fujimura, who is one of the original elders with Tim Keller in planting Redeemer Church back in New York City, is a renowned artist, but he's also written a lot of beautiful things. He's got a book called Culture Care and in it he says this, "Culture care leads to generative work and a generative culture. We turn wheat into bread-and bread into community. We turn grapes into wine-and wine into occasions for joyful celebration. We turn minerals into paints-and paints

into works that lift the heart or stir the spirit. We turn ideas and experiences into imaginative worlds for sheer enjoyment and to expand the scope of our empathy." We are called by God to have this holy ambition to step out and do what he's called us to do. But we don't have to look hard to see broken or shadow examples of this, right?

There's incredible arrogance and hubris all over the world, especially where I'm from in Silicon Valley. There's been all these documentaries in the last number of years on these founders that were trying to do these great things and these unicorns that failed miserably, right? We've seen that a lot. But as broken as some of those are, as I've watched a lot of those documentaries and movies and depictions of it, I couldn't help but ask myself, why does a human being believe they could do something so transformative and so magnificent? Why would they even imagine or dream that was possible? It's because God's written his eternal purposes in the heart of every human being. And every human being is an image bear of God. Stepping into that in a redemptive way requires Jesus and the Holy Spirit. But every human being has that impulse, has that ambition that needs to become a bridled and holy ambition, but ambition itself is not a bad thing. God gave that to you as a gift so you could have the imagination expanded to even, you know, begin to glimpse what his purposes are when he's going to fully and finally redeem everything in humanity.

So going back to Genesis 1:26-28, and Genesis 2:15, we'll do this briefly. There's these words, *rada*, which is often translated as rule or dominion. There's *kabash*, which is translated as subdue, *'abad*, which is translated as till, and *shamar*, which is translated as keep. So there's all these things where you're ruling and you're keeping, and you're governing, and you're guarding. But all of these are rooted in seeking God's glory and the good of the world, the good of your fellow human beings.

Scholar Andrew Basden says this, "The role of humanity in relation to the rest of creation is one of having authority for the sake of the rest of creation. We are to image God, i.e., represent God to the rest of creation by expressing his character. God's character is one of self-giving love. So should our rule be." There's a beautiful logic there, right, where you're called to step out and to do all these things, but you're called to do it as image bearers. And so you do it in the same way that God would do it. So God has incredible power and authority, and he delegates some of that power and authority to you to be used in your gifting in the marketplace, in your vocation, but he asks you to use that in a way that reflects his character. How does God use power and authority? Always to love and to serve, right? Look at the ministry of Jesus, all this incredible power, all this incredible potential for dominion, but he's using it to love and to serve always.

And so as we think of how we think about our vocation, this is not always possible in every area of life and every area of vocation, but I love the way that Amy Sherman encourages us to dream about this in her book called *Kingdom Calling*. She says, "The sweet spot is that place where our gifts and passions intersect with God's priorities and the world's needs. To the greatest extent possible, Christians should seek to work there." It's simply taking stock of who God's made you to be, the gifts, the callings, the talents, the resources that he's given you, and looking for a way

to deploy those that ultimately will maximize your fulfillment because you're working in a space that God's called you to work in. And this extends to absolutely every vocation. So on the foundation of that creation mandate, as we learn to embrace God's calling in our life, we then also grow in our ability to embrace risk, which sends us in that cycle of dependence, growth and greater risk, and a greater way stepping into God's purposes in your life. I'll remind you, all of life is risk, but God's in control and that's a good thing. And so we can embrace risk and step out and stretch because that's how God made us.

I had the opportunity last year to attend something called a driving school. Really a racing school. So part of it was for fun, the overwhelming part of it was to teach you driver safety or at least that's what I told my wife. But I've been driving, I don't know, 30, 35 years. I'm 49 years old and I thought I knew pretty much everything there was to know about driving and I'm behind the wheel of a Ford Shelby GT 500, 578 horsepower, zero to 60 in under four seconds, a pretty heavy car around a track with all these tight turns and everything else. And they give you a chalk talk and you go out and drive and they come back and review.

But the first thing they taught us was something so counterintuitive to me. And what they taught us is everything you know about driving's wrong because you've all been taught that you're in greatest control of your vehicle and you're safest when you're most cautious and riding the brake. But they said an engine, a car rather, is designed for you to be in maximum control when your foot's on the accelerator as long as you can handle the speed, right? When your foot's on the accelerator, your tires are gripped on the road and then you have maximum responsiveness. When you put the brake you have minimal responsiveness and you're limited in your ability to control your vehicle. So they spent the whole time trying to drive the caution out of us and help us to recognize that we are in greatest power when our foot's on the accelerator and we've been trained to drive.

And as I was telling a friend of mine that's a venture capitalist and a very successful entrepreneur this story, he said it really reminded him of a lot of his experience in work that when in venture capital and entrepreneurial stuff, when he was cautious, he realized oftentimes he wasn't really trusting in God. But when he was most effective is when he was pressing on that accelerator and a little bit scared because he recognized he couldn't do this without God. But the more he pressed on the accelerator, the more he depended upon God and the more he was able to expand and step out into what he was called to do.

And it's not just driving, that's all of our lives, right? Like what he was communicating to me about his life is true about your life and mine. We are best positioned when we are stepping on the accelerator, and by that I mean we understand how God's gifted and wired us, and we marshal all those giftings and resources to use them for his glory and the benefit of humanity, but we ask God, stretch me. Give me a mission and a vision that's only possible if you show up. Help me to trust that you're going to show up and press on that accelerator. And it's not about success or failure, it's about God's presence with you. And God promises to be there with you. He promises that risk is going to drive you, should drive you back into greater dependence upon him, and he's going to show up with the spirit's power and the redemptive work of Jesus every

time. And I think it's actually most comforting when you risk so much and you fail, and what you learn in the failure prepares you to go to the next thing.

But what does it look like to really fully depend upon Jesus? We need to spend more time in scripture, expanding our imagination and vision for who Jesus is because it gives us a greater and more solid foundation to trust him and not just trust him, but to be excited that he's at work in our life. And one of the passages that God's used most with me to teach me this was supposed to have been actually one of the early church hymns that is put into scripture and it's from Colossians 1:15-20. I don't know what it would look like for this to be a song every Sunday, but it would be awesome. "He's the image of the invisible God. The firstborn over all creation. For everything that was created was created by him in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through him and for him. He's before all things, and by him all things hold together. He's also the head of the body, the church. He's the beginning, the firstborn from the dead so that he might come to have first place in everything. For God was pleased to have his fullness, all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile everything to himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through the blood shed on the cross."

If this is Jesus, the image of the invisible God, the firstborn, over all creation, the one who created everything, the one who is before all things and the one that holds all things together, the one through whom everything is being reconciled to God; if this is Jesus and you're a follower of Jesus and if you're not, you can be today, and he's reconciled you to God and he's united you to himself and he is with you in every moment, daily empowering you, daily giving you the power and the presence of his Holy Spirit-why not pray to depend on him and work at maximizing the gifts he's given you for his glory and for the benefit of humanity. Isn't this what the Lord's prayer points to? The Lord's prayer teaches us, or Jesus taught his followers, and we are taught by extension to pray-speaking of the heavenly Father, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" We are to pray heavenly realities down to earth. That's how God calls us to look at our lives.

Salvation's massive. Salvation's foundational. There is no relationship with God without reconciliation. But reconciliation's not the end. It's only the beginning of God's purposes in your life now and for eternity. I love how N.T. Wright describes this in his book *The Day the Revolution Began*. It's an inspiring book. He says this, "Jesus died for our sins, not so we could sort out abstract ideas, but so that we, having been put right, could become part of God's plan to put the whole world right...Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of God's new project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven, but to colonize earth with the life of heaven. That, after all, is what the Lord's prayer is about."

We could chew on that for a long time, right? Like what does it look like to pray heavenly realities down to earth? Now we don't do it with utopian delusions that we can fully and finally accomplish it, but we say this is a heavenly reality. God helped me to be part of working in that, much the same way I would my own personal sanctification. I don't wake up every day thinking I'm going to become sinless and perfect, but I wake up every day, on good days, and ask God

help me to become more like Jesus. And so I optimistically orient myself towards being conformed into Christ's image. And I know I'm going to fail, but I know that that's my target and my goal and my empowerment. And that's what gives me joy and that's what gives me encouragement.

And we do the same thing with how we approach culture in the marketplace. It's going to continue to be broken in so many ways, but if I can bring some of those heavenly realities into the marketplace, if my marketplace, if my influence can be characterized by redemption and restoration and bringing order to chaos, and bringing light to darkness, and bringing beauty into the realm of ugliness, it's going to work and it's going to function because that's how God's made us.

Every human being, even the most ardent atheist is created in God's image. And God has written eternity on their hearts. And so when we live into these realities, God blesses it, and God works through it. God has given humanity, he's given you, volition and purposefulness, and intellect, and foresight, and imagination, and creativity, and the ability to work. And he's done it so you can be blessed by him and be close to him, so you can extend his purposes.

Ephesians 2:10 reminds us, "For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do." God created works ahead of time for you to do, and then he gifted you and he wired you and, in his providence, had you born in the family you were born into, had you given the opportunities you were given, none by accident, all by his providence, because he has works prepared for you to do. And the ability for us to step into those is stepping in the full freedom of what it means to be image bearers of God, redeemed and renewed in Christ. Redemption, our salvation, is a restoration of us, of every human being that's a follower Jesus, back to our created relationship with God, so that we can step into God's purposes for us.

God's given us the ability to embrace risk so we can depend upon him and extend his purposes. So the question for all of us is, with that holy ambition and redeemed imagination, what might God be calling you to do? We need to be praying God-sized bigger prayers and thinking in creative ways because our creativity, our imaginations, our giftings, are all reflective of God's character because we're image bears of God. Amen. Let me pray for us.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the inspiring words of scripture. We thank you Lord that mysteriously and wonderfully you have preserved these words for us so that we can know you and know your purposes for our world and know your purposes for our lives. And so I pray, Lord, that you would help each and every one of us in here to be challenged, to be encouraged, and to step into your purposes. And once again, Lord, I pray that if anyone is in here exploring faith or not sure where they are with their relationship with you, I pray, Lord, that you would help them to know that they can simply ask for your forgiveness and relationship, and you will draw them in, you'll adopt them, and they will be one of your children for all eternity. May that work happen today, may we all be blessed by the power of the Holy Spirit and the presence of Christ in our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.