

Theology of Work P1: A Story about Work

Exploring My Strange Bible Podcast

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Tim Mackie: Hey everybody. I'm Tim Mackie and this is my Podcast, Exploring my Strange Bible.

I am a card-carrying Bible history and language nerd who thinks that Jesus of Nazareth is utterly amazing and worth following with everything that you have.

On this podcast, I'm putting together the last 10 years' worth of lectures and sermons where I have been exploring the strange and wonderful story of the Bible and how it invites us into the mission of Jesus and the journey of faith and I hope this could be helpful for you too.

I also help start this thing called The Bible Project, we make animated videos and podcast about all kinds of topics in Bible and theology. You can find those resources at the BibleProject.com. With all that said, let's dive into the episode for this week.

All right, hey everybody. Thanks for listening to The Strange Bible podcast. And this is going to be the first, just a short two-part series. These were two teaching that I contributed to a teaching series at A Door of Hope church about thinking about work and career and vocation. At the moment, we had a ton of young twenty-somethings, met dozens and dozens of them were brand new followers of Jesus, living and working right in the core of Portland.

And we sensed at that moment in the church, we needed to help guide many of these people in helping them think about their work and vocation as a part of how they follow Jesus, of viewing their careers and vocations as a part of their discipleship to Jesus.

And there were a number of recent books out on the topic by Timothy Keller and a New Testament scholar, Ben Witherington. And so, we just thought, "Man, let's go with this." So, these were two teachings that I contributed.

This was the first one in the series that's called A Story about Work and essentially, I try and draw together portraits of what constitutes meaningful in modern American western culture versus the conception of work that we find in the storyline of the Bible. It's mostly talking about

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pages one through three of the Bible and how work is not a curse but actually one of the greatest gifts that God has given to the humans.

So, I hope this teaching is helpful for you. I had a lot of fun preparing for it. I learned a ton. And there you go, let's dive in and see what we find.

If we're following Jesus, it is a commitment. It's giving my allegiance to this One who died for me, gave His life for me, was raised for me, gives His Spirit to me. If part of my allegiance to Jesus in following Him is every area of my life being rethought, reevaluated, and experienced and then, hearing it in a new key, as it were, in light of the Gospel and the good news about Jesus, then obviously, what we do with the majority of our waking hours, namely some kind of work and very broadly, whatever that means, for your parents or part-time or your bi-vocational, whatever. Work, that's fine. Very broadly, whatever you do with your productive hours.

Surely, following Jesus should deeply inform how we think about and go about our work, right? I mean, if following Jesus has to do with all of our lives and with a huge majority of our lives is going to work, then surely there should be a connection.

Okay, so in theory, that sounds great but the other reason we're doing this series is because if, you know, we would have our sharing night or something and all of us could have a minute and a half to share about how integrate and out together my faith and commitment to Jesus and my work, or kind of my greater vision for work and where I'm going and what I want to do, almost certainly we were just getting huge, bewildering variety of responses, right?

And so, some people, I hope, would be honest and say, "Yeah, I have no idea, like, how following Jesus, what does that has to do with my work. I just go to work, you know. Let's just do it."

And some of us would be even more honest and say, "I've never even thought about that question. I've never thought about putting this thing- What do you mean? Do I-? Well, what does it mean?"

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And there might be some of us who have thought about this through some degree. So, we might think of, "Well, I talk with my coworkers about Jesus." It's one way to do that.

Some of us might say, "Well, I try to work from a different motivation. I work to bring honor and do excellent work, whatever it is I'm doing to honor God." Or, "I try to do my work-

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"With integrity or excellence." You know, it is different than other people.

And then I'm sure there would be some of us who would say, "You know what? You're right. Like, I don't see any connection between Jesus and my work. And so, I should probably quit my job or something. You know? Become a pastor, I guess, or a missionary or something, or go work for a non-profit that serves the poor or something, because that way, there will at least be a little bit more of a connection, right?"

Among that variety of answers, some I think are better than others. But the fact that there is a bewildering variety of answers, to me, shows again why we need to do a series like this. Because what that shows is the Christians, we need to be taught on this. We need to hear from the Scriptures about what we do, how will we do if the majority of our waking hours connects to our commitment to Jesus.

And I don't think most of us are really well-equipped to really think that through their work. And I don't think we're equipped because we lack a story, we lack a grand story about why work matters as a Christian.

And let's hear this in the words of somebody else, a guy named Andrew Delbanco. Andrew Delbanco is a professor at Columbia University, teaches American literature. And this is what he has to say. He writes very short little books, which is great. Short, little books, right? You love those short, little books.

They're little essays that basically explore different facets about just American culture and how weird and screwed up we all are basically. That's kind of his take on things.

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And so, he writes this book called *The Real American Dream: A Meditation on Hope*. And so, he starts the book, he says, "At the heart of any cohesive culture is a story that gives it hope, a story that helps us overcome the working suspicion that all our working and getting and spending amounts to nothing more than fidgeting while we wait for death."

It sounds like Ecclesiastes, right? Hope depends on finding some end to be pursued more extensive than merely instant desire. And the premise of this book is that human beings need to organize the events of our lives into such a story that gives us hope. Without it, we are, as the anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, has put it, a kind of formless monster with neither sense of direction or power of self-control in the chaos of vague emotions.

This is his description of modern American culture. It has become the thesis of the book, which is essentially: if there was any coherent narrative or story that brought Americans together, that has now all but faded and the main narrative that's out there is consume, meet your desires, try not to die. Which, he says, is no hope at all.

What that story does not offer you is any way to make sense of what we do with most of our days, which is just our working and why we're working and what we're working for. And most of us, he's saying, don't have such a grand story. We don't have some great goal or end that we see our jobs or work fitting into.

And so what are we left with? We're with the gratification of desire and so, I'm kind of into this thing and so, I want to pursue that. You know, if you kind of do that job for a while and then, get tired of that thing until, I mean, I kind of move over here. We're a very mobile society, very transient society. I saw enough people move and shift careers now, all over the place. And so, whatever, you know. Maybe you'll have eight, nine different careers. Thirty different jobs. But there's no greater goal.

What he's saying is essentially, if you don't have that greater end, what are human beings without a story to make sense of all the random stuff that happens in our lives and all of the days that we work? And so, he says, if you don't have a story, you quote this guy, it's such a great quote, I think, we become formless monsters.

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If you don't have a greater story to why it is and where you're going with your work, you lack direction. Why should you choose this job or another, why should you choose any job? You could just play Xbox all day or something. Why, what's the point?

And so, you lack direction, you lack the power of self-control, right? Because what possible motivation do you have to work super, super hard and to sacrifice for something if you don't really have any idea where you're going or any bigger purpose that you're working for?

Like, what's the motivation to work super hard? It's just kind of, like, all this work and just kind of get by, you know. And I guess, if that job is in our job, then-

And so, like, you end up as, you come from the chaos of vague emotion because you never caught up in the passion of something great that you're a part of, but then again, you're also not hugely disappointed because you never see yourself as a part of anything great.

And so, you end up with a culture of people who are just kind of bored. You know, whatever, and can go to work, I guess, whatever. You know, just kind of this disaffected, cynical-

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I felt like he'd been reading my mail and my generation's mail, you know what I'm saying? When he wrote this.

Our culture lacks a story about work and I'm convinced that that has a great influence on the church, and that we also lack a grand story for work besides the survival narrative, besides the consumer story, right, the weekend warrior story, whatever.

We lack a grand story about work is precisely what the Scriptures are trying to offer us. Turn to page one of the Bible with me. Just a simple observation about the first sentence of the Bible.

In English, here are the first three words of the Bible, what are they? "In the beginning." Let's stop right there. What kind of books begin with a line like, "In the beginning," or "A long time ago," or "A long time ago in a land

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far, far away, a great adventure have-" so what kind of books begin like this?

Epic tales, epic stories. Narratives. "In the beginning." Stories. The Bible, in its essence, is a grand story that claims to be telling the story of our world that we happen to be sitting in right now. And as we're going to see, we're going to camp out in Genesis 1, 2, 3 tonight and you might think, "What does that have to do with work?"

Like, I thought it has to do with everybody debate about creation and evolution and so on. Here's the caveat, so reading the Genesis, 1 through 3 especially, is very much like what happens to Americans when they go to France.

Mainly, they don't pay any attention to, like, dress code. And so, Americans go there with, like, shorts and tubes socks pulled up high. And when they get off the plane, without a phrase book going around, asking where the McDonald's is, you know.

And it's just like, "What?" You know, like, we're arrogates. We're cultural arrogates, right? Now, I think we do a very similar thing when many of us pick up these chapter in the Bible and we just assume that the Bible is going to speak my language and talk about things the way that I think about them and answer the questions that I happen to have as a 21st century westerner, you know?

And we're just like, "No, stop that. That's rude. That's rude. No, you're stepping into another time, another culture's way of seeing the world, you need to humble yourself." Have your first assumption be, "I probably am not understanding this on the first go. I'll need some help. I probably need help."

And so, if my conviction, that actually, most of the energy that gets wasted on these chapters is about questions that that story is actually not trying to answer and it's making the story do something that it's never designed to do.

But when we actually pay attention to the themes of the story itself, you'll see one of the main things these chapters are doing is offering us a grand

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story about work and the meaning of work and labor and vocation for humanity but much, much larger because the first worker in the Bible is not a human. It's God.

Let's dove in here to the grand story of work. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Okay, let's stop real quick here. Now, we need to slap our hands. So when you hear the word "earth" for contemporary English, what does the word earth refer to in English? What's the image that comes in your head?

A planet. Mainly, a globe, right? That's a beautiful picture, right? Planet Earth and the oceans and comets or whatever, clouds or something. So, question, so how long does the human imagination even been able to have that image in its mental furniture? At least, in terms of the color picture that comes into all of our heads.

Satellite image? First satellite image of earth? So that's early 1960's. Right now, 50 years old, okay? How old is Genesis Chapter 1? Oh yeah, 3,500 years old. You know, so start there.

So, what would an Israelite author 3,500 years ago mean when he says earth? Not a planet. In the beginning, God made the heavens. What are the heavens? This is what's up there. And what's the earth? This is what's down here.

And when did God make and create what's up there and what's down here? It's in the beginning. So, when's that? It's actually quite a vague word in Hebrew, let alone English.

And so, most of the questions that we come to Genesis with is one with, like, how and how long and how exactly. And the author was like, "No, I don't care about that. I have a different story to tell. In the beginning, God made what's up there and what's down here. Let's keep going."

So that's interesting, right? Because, look, the story is not concerned with all of that. The story is concerned with, now that everything is here, what's happening here? That's what Genesis 1 is.

So, what's interesting is, the majority of Genesis 1 is not a story about God making-

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Something out of nothing. The story doesn't even talk about that. It just says God made it all back then. What's the story is interested in is how God is turning what's here into something better because of the Verse 2, it's great.

So now, what's down here, the land or earth, it was formless and empty, and darkness was over the surface of the deep. Let's again pause real quick here.

Whatever that's supposed to mean, does that sound good to you? Formless and empty and darkness. Is this a good thing?

Well, it depends. It depends. Yeah, it's kind of neutral, isn't it? Okay, so here's a few things. First of all, if you have the globe still in your mind, this will make no sense whatsoever. Well, there was a new Christian that's reading and so he was like, "So is this blob of clay floating in the universe or something? I don't know, what is it, is there nobody living there or something? I don't get it."

So first, you know, how it is with me, so what's great is this is a wonderful phrase in Hebrew. It's a rhyme: *tohu wa-bohu*. *Tohu wa-bohu*. "Formless and empty" is one way to render it. The best way I've come across is from a Jewish scholar named Robin Fox. It preserves the rhyme, "Wild and waste." Now we're talking.

Wild and waste. These are words used elsewhere in Hebrew to describe desert and wasteland. And so, the idea is, indicating God made what's up there and what's down here. He made it all back then, okay.

Now that it's here. It's in a state of *tohu va-bohu*. Now, is this good or bad? Well, it depends on who you are. If you're a lizard, is *tohu wa-bohu* bad? No, that's where you live. You live in the desert wasteland, you know what I'm saying? Is it bad if you're a fox or a spider or something? No.

For whom is *tohu wa-bohu* not good? Us. Humans are going to be the pinnacle point of this particular story in Genesis Chapter 1. Everything is seen through the view of what is winding up for humans in a good space. It's a very human-centered view of the universe, Genesis Chapter 1.

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And how can it be anything else? It's 3,500 years old. That's just the nature of the story, it's part of the point of the story, as you'll see.

So, this state of affairs, however, it's fine for the lizards, it's not good for the humans. The rest of Genesis 1 is about God taking *tohu wa-bohu* and turning it into something wonderful. Darkness that was over the surface at the deep, but what's there hovering in that dark, wild, waste place?

It's got His spirit. His personal life-giving presence is there, and God's personal life-giving, energizing presence shows up in the dark wasteland and what starts happening when God shows up in dark waste places? Good stuff happens, right? Life shows. It's all over 3.

So, this is another good one, where it's like, "No. Stop it, stop it." Right? And God said, "Let there be light." And we think, "Oh, yeah. Exactly, lights. Those little, super, teeny-tiny pockets of energy called photons that are emitted by the sun, right? That hit the earth, photosynthesis, and so on." Right?

That's a very modern concept of light as a thing. Is light a thing, it can be manufactured and made? Let's keep reading.

God said, "Let there be light. And there was light, and God saw that the light was good. He separates light and darkness." He's bringing order.

"God called the light," and He doesn't not call it photon, does He? What does He call it? Day. "And the darkness He called night." Now, let's stop right there.

Is day a thing that you make? You know what I'm saying? So, no. Day is a period of time that is meaningful for whom specifically? Humans, right?

God doesn't make anything on the first day. All He does is He declares a meaningful division between not light and light. God's creating time here as it were. He's creating structure and order in the midst of chaos. So that's essentially what Geneses 1 is, what God is up to. It's His bringing order.

He's taking what already exists and He's bringing and declaring it to be meaningful and ordered. And so, this is essentially what Genesis 1 is. Okay, we have to skip over the rest now, basically.

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And so, this is all that Genesis 1 is. It's in ways that are different than how we think about the world and ways that we're very familiar to this author, and the audience and so on. He's talking about God creating, the potential for weather and rain, and the potential for agriculture with dry land, and so on.

And then, after those, after creating all of these, ordered divisions when He fills the world with all of these inhabitants. Let me go to Verse 11. Verse 11 is a good one for what God is up to here.

It says: "Let the land produce vegetation, seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it."

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"According to their various kinds and it will sow." So what kind of trees are just sprouting and generating out of the earth here? What kind of trees? Seed-bearing plants and trees, so fruit trees. Fruit trees.

Now immediately, we're, with our modern mindset think, well, what about all the other trees? Yeah, what about all the other trees, the deciduous tree and the fir trees and evergreen trees? And the author was like, No, fruit trees are what He's focusing on because fruit trees are going to especially beneficial for whom?

For humans, right? Fruit trees are going to play a key role in the story, aren't they? Right? That's the whole point, he's teeing you up. Here, look at Verse 24, here's a good one too:

"God said, let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds." Livestock, creatures that live on the ground, wild animals, all according its kind. That's how ordered everything is, with the species and kind and so on.

Now, where are the land creatures being generated out of right here? Look closely. What does it say? Just the land. Well, how? How has that happened? I think the zombies coming up out of the grave. It's a very wide, open statement: The land generates creatures.

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In other words, the vision is God is taking *tohu wa-bohu*, He's bringing order. And then, I think they're, like, a big TNT like powder cake and it's just stuffing full of potential and energy that's just ready to burst and generate life and goodness and so on. Just produce and so on. Just go, go, go, right?

And that's essentially what happens in Genesis 1. He's packed it full of potential to just generate and life and goodness, which is actually what He calls them. Look at the last verse of chapter 1, verse 31:

"When God looks, and He sees this ordered, beautiful world, God saw all that He had made," and what does He say about it? It's very good, it's very good. The Hebrew word for good is *tov*. So, God turns *tohu wa-bohu* into *tov*. Do you get it? It's a word play. It's a word play.

He takes what is wild and waste and He turns it into something that is good. Now what does it mean? Well, we already know one piece of it, it's that He's bringing order out of the chaotic darkness, and so on. So, it's God bringing order, but then we're also going to see that He really highlights that are pleasing to the eye. We'll see this in Chapter 2.

So, He takes what is dark and wild and waste, and He creates a place of great beauty. Do you live in the northwest? Do I need to say any more? You know what I'm saying?

So, the sun sets, the last couple of nights. What? I mean, just incredible. Place of incred- sun and moon and stars and clouds and weather and creatures, and so on. So, it's amazing. A place of incredible aesthetic wonder.

But know this, He doesn't just make this to, like, sit there and float out there. He's making it for the humans. What are the elements of the world that are specifically highlighted? Elements that bring order or benefit humans. Fruit trees and day and night, and so on.

And so, what God is taking is this raw wasteland and He's shaping and ordering it to be a place of beauty and a place of benefit for others. This is what good means: order and beauty. It brings benefit. Let's keep going.

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God saw, He made it so good and beautiful and ordered. It's perfect for the human beings, and so on. And so, the heavens and the earth were completed in their vast array. By the seventh day, God had finished the what? Work. Well, it's the first-time work is used in the Bible.

Who's the first worker in the Bible? It's God. And what is God's work? It's this right here. How exactly He generated the material world, the Bible just says, yeah, just in the beginning He made what's up there and what's down here.

God's work in the world in the model of work that we see here in Genesis 1 is about taking what is full of disorder and darkness and raw materials and generating a world of order that's beautiful and it brings benefits to others. This is described as work.

God finished His work on the seventh day. He rested from His work. And God bless the seventh day because He made it holy and because on it, He rested from the work of creating what He had done.

Josh is going to explore next week in the series this theme of rest and sabbath and how it fits in to the Biblical vision of work. So, it's very important.

But notice three times we're told that this is God's work. What does it mean to work? So, I've said it, like, five times. Let me say it for, like, twenty more times. Would that be okay? But it's taking-

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This wild wasteland, bringing out the potential in it, but not yet brought into the order, beauty, and benefit.

Now, if you're bringing about something of benefit, so you're a worker, God's the worker here. It begs the question: benefit for whom? For someone else. Do you see that here? For the humans, as what you're seeing in Verse 26.

So, in other words, I couldn't find a really good way to do some of the drawings so I'll put it up here. Work generates order and beauty and

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benefit because it generates something that is meant to be shared. Benefit is something you do for something that's to be shared.

Now, the Biblical vision of work is not simply survival, right? So, survival is, like, roaming around in wild and waste, surviving off of nuts and berries, you know what I mean? So, it's a scavenger.

But God's not scavenging here. He's generating out of His creativity and His mind something of beauty that will bring benefit to others. Work is an others-centered activity. Do you see this here?

Work is something God does so He can share the fruits of His work with others. It's the vision of work here. It's not just survival, it's sharing. It's an others-centered vision.

But He wants to share it and specifically with one creature in particular. And go to Verse 26. These were God's first co-workers. That's funny to me, God's first co-workers.

Verse 26: "God said, 'Let's make mankind, humans, in our image and in our likeness and so they can rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky and the livestock and the wild animals, over all the creatures that move along the ground.'"

So, there's all these creatures bursting with potential, who's now going to take on the role of also bringing order and generating beauty for the benefit of others and so on? It's now these creatures and they rule, which doesn't mean they live in the 80's or something.

That's my joke about ruling in the Bible, because, right? I don't have a concept, you rule over animals? Put them in a zoo? Yeah, I'm a city guy. Like, what does that it even mean?

So, it's the idea that there's all this potential out there but even, like, healthy tomatoes aren't just going to, like, fall from heaven on your plate. You got to get out there and do something. So, like, venison isn't just going to appear in your freezer. You need to go and hunt.

That's ruling. God created humanity in His own image, in the image of God He created them. Male and female, He created them, both genders reflect

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the image of the one God. God is neither wholly reflected in one or the other. It's their oneness and difference that reflects the image of God. Fascinating and we have to skip it and keep moving.

Verse 28: "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number. Fill the earth, subdue it, rule over the fish of the sea and birds of the sky, every creature that moves on the ground.'"

Okay, so, this is so fascinating. Humans are the only creatures in Genesis 1 who are told to reproduce. Isn't that interesting? So, the land creatures just do it, literally, you know what I'm saying? So, rabbits, they just go, you know? They just go. They just multiply.

But humans are somehow intentionally reproduced. What's going on here? So, just think about the vision of humanity, it's different.

Humans are made to reflect, they are the image of God. In other words, humans are distinct from the other creatures and that the ways that we go about relating to tohu wa-bohu and to God's good world is different than other creatures because when rabbits multiply, they just make more rabbits. When humans multiply, we make families and we make neighborhoods and we make cities that make food and music and art and culture, you know what I'm saying?

We don't just make more of ourselves, we make societies. Flowers and apple trees, when they reproduce, they just make more flowers and apple trees. When humans reproduce, they take the flowers and they cut bouquets and sell them at farmers' markets. And they cultivate the apple trees and make them grow in ways that they wouldn't normally so that they can grow actually even more yummy apples to sold also at the farmers' market while somebody is singing a poem that they wrote about the apple blossom tree, or something. You know what I'm saying?

So that's the idea. When humans multiply, they remake the earth. They don't just make more of themselves, they remake the earth. And so, we have to be intentional how it is we go about reproducing. It's so interesting.

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Fill the earth and subdue it. It's this popular in Portland to talk about this? Subduing. Now, is there any hint of, like-

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negativity or exploitation or something like this? Is this before or after evil is in the story? So, it's before.

Subduing is asserting my will over something so that it yields its potential or increases its potential. Apple trees will make some apples if you just let them go wild. They'll make more apples that will benefit more people if you subdue an apple tree. Like a grapevine or something, you learn the art of viticulture, you can make awesome wine. Grapevine is not just going to make awesome grape for wine, right? So, you have to subdue it.

Even, like, the most super, whatever, Portland thing. Like, it's their urban community farm or something. Like that. For a little 20 by 20 plot that you have three years to get, right? We sign up when you finally get it but it's not just going to grow awesome peppers or something just waiting for you to eat if you never do anything.

You have to assert your will over it and work over it and yield the potential. Somehow, there's a potential in the sun, water, that dirt, and useful seeds and then the weeding that we have to do. And somehow, that makes awesome food for myself and then, let me share with other people.

You know, that's the idea here. You subdue. You bring a certain amount of will and bring out the potential. It's a positive thing. It's a vision of work.

And actually, subduing is what God has been doing in Genesis 1, right? Taking *tohu wa-bohu* and turning it into *tohu*. And so now, He invites the humans to do is the exact same thing. And because if you, like, multiply, if you domesticate cows and if you start, like, big farms, yes, the dairy farmer will be fed but so will a whole lot of other people too. That's the whole point.

So, humans are called to imitate the first worker. So, this is the beautiful vision of work in Genesis Chapter 1. It's something God does and then it's something He gives over to these image-bearing creatures. And work is

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this dignified beautiful vocation of taking what is potential and bringing order and beauty so that others can benefit more than just me surviving.

You see? This is a beautiful vision right here. So, this grand story of work that I think most of us lack, this is one of these fixed points right here. Notice what kind of work is being praised and highlighted here, in information age, what we would call manual labor.

It doesn't matter what kind of work humans do. Well, okay, that's not entirely true. There are some kinds of work that can actually be extremely degrading to human beings and actually cause them to lose their own humanity. We take that for granted, they're typically trade to exploit other human beings in the process and so on. So, we're getting there.

But most human vocations and jobs are given this great status of God-like dignity because God is the first worker and humans are called to imitate God. You see a human at work? You see the image of God. That's the vision of Genesis 1.

And Genesis 2 comes alongside it and fleshes it out in a really unique way. Genesis 2 and Genesis 1 are distinct ways of getting at the same story. They use different language, different imagery, different timelines, and so on, but they're all getting at the core, same images.

Look at Genesis 2 with me, Verse 4. How are you guys doing? All right, thank you. Genesis 2:4 "This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they are created," when Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

Now, know that, sure, they had yet appeared on the earth and, you know, planet had sprung up for the Lord God of heavens that reign on the earth and there wasn't anybody to work the ground. There's nobody to work the ground. Man, I wish that somebody would come along, right? Hint, hint, right?

Streams came out from the earth, water surfaced the whole ground. What's this a picture of in Genesis 2? It's telling the same story with Genesis 1, which is about beginning with wild and waste and there's no agriculture or farming, there's nobody there to bring out the potential.

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So, the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being. This is such a great image right here.

Humans, the word for human in Hebrew is adam. The word for dirt in Hebrew is adamah. So, God makes adam out of the adamah. It's very similar to English, I'm pretty sure, where the word human is related to the word hummus, which means earth, right? Earthlings. Earthling would be a good translation right here. God made earthlings out of the earth.

The idea is not trying to get us a description of the process of manufacture of human beings. These are images about the nature of human beings. What are human beings?

We come from the earth, we're intimately connected to it because we know we go back to it when we die. We're made of the earth but humans also-

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Stand on this border between heaven and earth, right? There's a distinction, a uniqueness. So, we're dirt and divine breath. A divine spark of energy that we are, we exist because of a grace of the Creator. That's the image here.

And forming, this is such a great image. Forming is the word used for potters in the Bible and artisans, right? Of the artisans sitting at a wheel of a lump and shaping intentionally and so on. It's like God goes into the, you know, I don't know, I think that's making pots but, you know, He goes into wherever you go to make pots and that kind of activity, right? So that's the idea.

So then, look at Verse 8, it's great. Who's the first gardener in Genesis 2? Who's the first worker in Genesis 1? God. And then, he gets some co-workers. Who's the first gardener in Genesis 2? Well, say it. The Lord God planted a garden in the east. In Eden, there He put the man He had formed.

The Lord God made all these trees grow out of the ground, some that are just good to look at, putting trees that are pleasing to the eye. There were

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some objects and creations that are just there because they're stinking amazing. Holy cow. And then some are of benefit. Some that were good for food.

Now, in the middle of the garden, there's also these, you know, the Tree of Life, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. We'll talk about those in a second. Go now to Verse 15:

"The Lord God then took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work." To work it and take care of it. So here, the image is not ruling or subduing, it's a related image of working, which you already have an idea of here, but also care. There's an intention and attention, a carefulness in the stewarding and gardening as we go about our work in bringing.

But what's the whole point of gardening? If you're making a huge garden, yes, of course, you're going to get something to eat, but the whole point of the garden is to make a surplus of food so that others can eat. It's the same exact vision of work.

So, here's work in the Bible. The first grand story of work. It's a divine gift, it's something that humans do to imitate the creativity and the goodness of The Creator. It's something that humans do whatever little patch of the garden that happens to be in front of us. We work to bring order and beauty so that we benefit, and others can benefit too.

It's the vision of work in Genesis 1 and 2. It's beautiful. It's profound, isn't it? Does the story end here? Okay, no. No, the good times are rolling, right? How long do the good times roll?

We're on page two and it lasts about two pages, right? Because the story gets a lot more complex with these trees here. These trees. Let's keep reading. Verse 16:

"Now, Lord God commanded the man, 'You're free to eat from any tree from the garden but you mustn't eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil for when you eat of it, you'll certainly die.'" And stop. Stop real quick here.

So, so, many misunderstandings here again, some of that that says, "Is that magic fruit, what do you mean?" So, look. Stop, stop.

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Who has been the provider of the good so far in this story? God. And when God makes something good, it's really good. You get, like, sunsets and fruit trees. But what God is offering to these images of God-bearing creatures is a freedom and a dignity, moral maturity.

So, one of these trees is called the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This is about discerning between what is good and not good. Who's been the sole provider of good in the story? So, God has been.

So, here's really what this tree represents here: will the humans put themselves under, right? Humble themselves before this creative, wonderfully, beautifully inspired Creator and submit to God's definition of what is good and not good, God's knowledge of good and evil? Or are they going to cease autonomy and opportunity to know, that is to define good and evil for ourselves? That's the idea.

And there's no greater place with that question becomes important than human work because, of course, human work poses all kinds of really difficult complex scenarios and decisions for us, right? So, you want to expand your garden, but you've got a neighbor there and there's this boundary line and it's like, "Well, I want my garden to go over there."

So, what are you going to do about that? Well, you have some different choices. You can stick with God's wisdom and say, "Well, He doesn't give me 20 by 40 lot. He gave me 20 by 20 so I'm not going to steal his land." Or you can cease the opportunity, "What's good for me is that I'm able to provide for more people if I had a bigger garden so I'm going to find a loop hole in the law." You know what I mean? That's the idea. Yeah, I was trying to play it out with a metaphor, but you see where this is going.

Work is the place where human beings-

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Exercise their moral judgment all of the time. And of course, you know, the most outstanding intuitions or memories from human history where this has gone terribly wrong is where humans subdue not just the creation to bring out its potential, but where humans subdue other humans so that

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they work for virtually nothing and have their dignity stripped for them to provide for somebody else.

There's an example of this whole things going wrong, right? That's the idea here. And what are the humans going to choose? Are they going to trust God's definition of what's good and not good as they go about their work or are we going to define our own terms, become our own god?

Well, you know how the story goes, right? Probably because you've heard this story before, also probably because you and I live this story every single day, don't we? Chapter 3:

"Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God really say, "You must not eat from any tree in the garden?"'" Okay, let's stop here and just address a few problems like the talking snake, you know what I'm saying?

So that's true. It's weird. The white elephant in the room, let's just name that. It's bizarre. Let's not become, like, too smug, right? As, like 21st century modern people over primitive people, you know, though stories 3,500 years old. And so, that's ridiculous. It's ridiculous.

Do you really think people 3,500 years ago believed that snakes talk too? You know what I'm saying? That's ridiculous, right? The whole point of the story is we all know that snakes don't talk, this is quite extraordinary, you know what I'm saying? No matter what millennia you happen to be living in, right? This is very remarkable.

So, whatever's happening is very strange. Somehow, something that we all know is, a snake has become a vehicle of some other power, of some other being. Is that right? I think that's what the story forces you to put together. What is that being? And where is that-

And the story is just like, "No, I don't care. I'm not going to tell you about that. I'm not interested in that." But this is the story that it's interested in: the origin of the being that caused this problem. But the story of the Bible is the story of what God is doing about this being and what this being do to humans and what it's doing. That's what the story the writer's about.

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So, what is this creature, being, do? Notice the way this creature works, he deceives. He's like, "Listen, you know. Yeah, God said He was providing good for you but really, I mean, it's kind of legalistic. You're not supposed to eat from any tree, you know." Right?

Is that what God said? Well, God said eat from any tree, you know, in the garden except this one which represents this much, much bigger issue here about the knowledge of good and evil.

And so, what the humans are posed with right here is a choice. Do I think God's holding out one me? I mean, I've got some big dreams for what I can do with my garden and it would be convenient for me if there's a few things that God said I shouldn't do, if I actually could do them so maybe this works. Maybe He's holding out on me.

You know, that's what the serpent is doing. And so, whatever this creature is, you know he's from the story this much, is this creature, we might call this the source of evil or something. Is this the being that is somehow of equal status to The Creator that has God biting His fingernails in the story?

It's a creature. It's a creature in rebellion against The Creator and it's inviting other creatures to rebel along with it, which is precisely what happens, right?

And so again, we're summarizing here because I want to get to the payoff in Verse 17, right? So, the humans, they eat off the tree. They rebel and what immediately happens? What immediately happens is sin enters into the story and it begins to undo all that God made for good and turned it back into tohu wa-bohu again.

And so, this wonderful relationship and institution that God granted the humans and marriage for order and beauty and to benefit each other and to benefit others, right? And they were naked with each other and they weren't ashamed.

All of a sudden, now that they have different views of knowledge of good and evil, they have to hide from each other, right? Because I can't trust you because your definition of good and evil might be different than mine, right? And so, let's keep a healthy distance, right?

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So this marriage gets fragmented, a family gets fragmented. Humanity's relationship to God becomes fragmented and distorted. Humanity's relationship to their work becomes fragmented. Look over 17, this is so interesting.

"To Adam," or to the human, "He said, 'Because you listened to your wife, you ate fruit of the tree that I commanded you, saying, 'You must not eat from it,' cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days-

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"Of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

This is good news and sad news. So, will humans be able to continue eating? Yes, three times it said you will eat, you will eat, you will eat, but the environment has changed.

God made the world to need work. It's not like humans are supposed to learn [00:45:35.00] having grapes popped into their mouths or something. That's not the image. Humans were supposed to work and work hard, right? Because God worked hard, and humans are supposed to work hard.

But now, there's going to be resistance and now, the human efforts are going to be swatted by. And so, this poetic image here of thorns and thistles, you know, that's like some sort of silly, like, "And here's where weeds came from," you know? It's a poem, come on, you guys. It's a poem.

What are weeds? If you're a gardener, weeds are your arch enemy because you're out there two days trying to produce your tomato plants, I speak from experience, right? And in two days, you're just out there, all those works and then you come back three days later and they're all back in greater number, the weeds are. And you're just like, "What? No, no."

You don't want them to kill off all that, your plants. So, I can't tell you how many times Jessica and I planted. We had a house in Madison, in Wisconsin. We planted a garden and, like, we get, like a quarter of what we

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thought we would get out of it because of the weeds, the woodchuck, you know what I mean?

So, woodchucks are not right here in the poem but there was one in my backyard and it was massive. And it ate all of our peas and all of our strawberries. Like, it destroyed. It destroyed our garden. So, woodchucks.

So, here's the thing, the woodchuck is fine in *tohu wa-bohu* but not in my backyard because we made a garden, you know what I'm saying? That's the idea here. There's resistance. And this resistance comes from all sorts of places.

There's stuff that happens that I have absolutely no control over, like this woodchuck. But then, there's other things that, like what it says, "Through your own painful toil, by the sweat of your brow," there's resistance that's internal to me. There might be resistance that just comes from my own lack of ability, from my own stupidity and just dumb choices that I make.

Then all of a sudden, there are weeds that I shouldn't have planted or did the wrong temperature or the wrong depth of the roots or something. And then, you know what I'm saying, this is the image here.

And so, all of a sudden, sin has fragmented our judgment, our morals. Remember, work is all about our moral decisions. Work requires moral decisions. Work requires moral decisions of all of us all of the time.

And so, if that's distorted and screwed up, then all of a sudden, the relationships where we carry out our work are going to be distorted and screwed up. And then, there's just the distortion of sin out there in the world.

There's the sign of my coworkers that's going to spill over into my life and then to my work. And then there's this stuff that happens, market conditions, art rights whatever, and I had this startup idea and then it was perfect. It was just nobody wanted to put any money into it and the conditions weren't right, but I was sure it was a good idea. You know what I'm saying?

Well, I'm sorry. Thorns and thistles, you know. That's the nature of the world. So, it's so fascinating. Genesis offers this beautiful, dignified vision

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of work. It's like imitating The Creator, it's to bring order, beauty, and benefit for others to share.

But now, that we live in this post-fall world where our hearts are compromised by selfishness and sin, our dreams and goals will never accomplish as much as we want to be realized because we live with weeds and thorns and thistles and so on.

And what Genesis asks us is to hold both of these in our hands as the world in which we live. And so, here's what's interesting. I think generationally speaking, even in the church, it's easier to tend towards one or the other and to say, "The world is good. Work is awesome. The world's your oyster," you know?

And so, that's the naive idealist or something like that. And then you have like, the heart of realist where he's just like, "No. Grit your teeth and bear it," or something. It's like my grandpa, for example.

So, my grandpa, you know, was born in depression, post-world war two. Became an electrician, he was lucky to find a job, he worked it for forty years and you just do it. What do you mean, you don't like your work, you ninny? Go to work. You know what I mean?

So, it doesn't make you happy and fulfilled, you just go to work. You know what I'm saying, you just work, right? And so, there are many ways in which I cannot blame him, but he resonated very much with the Genesis 3 vision of work. Life is hard, so you just work to provide and to get by. That's my grandpa.

And then, you have my dad, right? Who's growing up in the 60's. And so, he was a part of all that in the idealism and so on. And so, he learned a trade in metal manufacturing. And this is so cruel, he went to trade school and literally the year that he got into his first job, his entire field was made obsolete by a new piece of technology.

He trained four years for this and now it's completely obsolete. And so, he had this dream where he always wanted to be a painter.

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"Yeah, I just want to be an artist," and he actually was really good at it. Grew up, three houses in from Grand Central Bakery here and my dad has a studio in the garage, in the backyard. And he was living the dream, he was loving it. He was fulfilled and so on. It led to extremely lean years for our family.

My first experiences of having to ride the public bus system were because my mom had to go to work because my dad wasn't making enough money, which I thought was wonderful. All these interesting people and things I've never seen before, you know, happening on the bus and so on. My mom lamented it.

But anyway, so my dad was, like, living this dream. And so, he's living out of Genesis 1 and 2. And again, I don't question the decisions that he made but it led us to some hardships for our family because it wasn't actually providing sometimes. Which is it, you know?

And then they produced me and I'm a part of this Andre Delbanco generation where I grew up in the baby boomer wealth and son on. And of course, I just finished college and then, like, job. Well, it appeared to me and of course, the world owes me a job, you know, because here I am, I'm out of college, you know?

And it's super hard, and then I got into grad school. So, then you end up with no direction, self-control, or chaos and vague emotions. And what Genesis 1 and 2 is saying, "No, it's based on who you are, based on the garden plot that God places you in." We'll talk about that in the third week of the series. Discerning vocation, right? And calling.

But based on the garden plot that I'm in, you may be in a Genesis 1 and 2 season, you may be in a Genesis 3 season. You are likely going to face both at the same time in many seasons.

And the fact that you're working super hard doesn't necessarily mean that you're in the wrong place. It just means you live in a world compromised by sin along with the rest of us. And life is hard because of that, you know?

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But that's the vision of work. If we have the design of work and then the ruin of work, is there any hope for the redemption of work? Look at the poem in Verses 14 and 15:

"God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, you're cursed above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.'

You're doomed for defeat and shame, essentially, what it's telling me. Now, pay close attention. Hold your Bibles up and this is one of those important verses in the Bible, FYI. God says:

"I will put enmity," or hostility, "between you and the woman." Who's the you right there? It's the serpent or the snake. Hostility between the snake and the woman. "And hostility between your offspring and her offspring."

Who's the "your offspring"? Serpent and her offspring. What? It's so weird. So, is this like humans don't like snakes? Is that what this is talking about? This is weird. What's happening?

From this event, they'll go forward to lineages the humans can align themselves with. Those who give in to the lures of the serpent, give in to the evil, give in to the temptation, or those who are going to cling to align in a hope of God's promise.

Because look what happens: there's going to be hostility between you, the serpent, him alone, between your offspring and her offspring. "He will crush your head." Who's the "your head"? The serpent. Who's the "He"? The Offspring.

So, there is coming from the line of the woman a "He" and He's not going to crush baby snakes. He's going to crush him, the source itself. That's so powerful, you guys. And how is this One going to crush the very source of evil itself?

He's going to step on him, right? You can see, "He will crush your head." But what is the serpent going to do to this Victor the moment of his victory? In other words, this Victor is going to be wounded as the means of His crushing becoming victorious.

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This is so awesome, right? And so, here's the idea, it's that somehow, this Victor is going to come who has to take the venom of the serpent into Himself to absorb it fully into Himself. What is the venom of the serpent? It's the evil that he's released and lured all of humanity into.

And so, this Victor comes and He takes it into Himself but that very absorbing is the means by which He crushes and destroys the source of evil itself. And of course, if you destroy the source of evil, what are the implications of that for work and the promise of work?

Right, it's for the redemption of God's good world. This is why at the end of the Bible, at the very last pages of the Bible, which we won't turn to, is a depiction, not of everybody floating away somewhere to some non-physical place. It's about God's space heaven coming here and it's a recreation of the garden of order and beauty and goodness. But it's also a city-

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At the same time because cities are where these dense populations where people are working in tandem, all in interdependence on each other.

If you have a city, garden, world without sin, what do you have? You just have lots of tov being produced. Which means, lots of shared goodness.

And that's how the story of the Bible ends, with work's redemption. Work's redemption. But we're not there yet, are we? You're very, very aware if you go to work tomorrow morning, you're not going to the garden of Eden. But this is the grand story of the Bible.

I realize this is a long teaching but there's no other way to do it. You just got to do it. This is the grand story of work.

How do our stories fit into that? I mean, the whole point is that the moment of the cross where Jesus absorbs human sin and evil into Himself, what it enables in the present is a slow partial marching forward of this redemption of God's work in our lives. And so, this side of Jesus' return, we won't experience the garden of Eden but we are called to allow more and

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more of His redemptive work to take over our lives and where do we spend most of our working days where this redemption will work itself up?

At work. So, what are the kinds of questions that we should be asking? So, this story that humans are called to imitate, now depending on the work of Jesus for us, I mean, this is a very broad story.

You could retell this story of work right here about seven billion times, which is almost how many humans there are, because God has placed us all in very different garden plots. I mean, really, just think of your own workplace and ask some Genesis 1 and 2 questions.

What's this garden all about? How does it work? Where is there tohu wa-bohu in your workplace? Really, you know. If you work in an office or something like that, you know. I guarantee there's wild and waste going on.

Where's the tohu wa-bohu inside of you? You know what I mean, that's contributing the tohu wa-bohu that's in your workplace. Of course, it's easy to point out that tohu wa-bohu in somebody else that makes work part of various- but you know, that's what this class does. It humbles you.

Where can you put your hand to your place in work that can bring order or do something beautiful that is just purely for the benefit of other people? How can I enter into my workplace not with just, like, my next, like, three paychecks so I can do the weekend warrior thing in mind?

But actually like, no, how can I be a benefit? How can I, like, do something that would bring, like, joy or, like, surprise to the people around me? Even if I don't really like them. I think Jesus said a thing or two about that, right? You know what I'm saying?

Because the vision of work is others-centered here. What would this mean in your workplace?

And maybe some of us might need to ask some Genesis 3 questions of our work. Like, where have things gone wrong here in the place that I work? What's the problem? Is there any way that what Jesus has done for me could somehow be part of solving a problem around here or mediating an

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argument or seeking peace or finding a way to solve a problem so that more people can benefit from what we're already doing?

It's Genesis 3, what's gone wrong here because of human sin and folly. How could I be a part, through God's grace, of making it better? That's a Genesis 3 type of questions that happen. But it's all about learning to tell the story.

So, there you go. That's the vision of work in Genesis 1 through 3. And so, I don't know where you're at, you know. You may be very frustrated and confused about where you're at in life right now in relation to work. You can't find work, you don't want to find work, so that's not good. Josh will talk about that some more.

But we're all called to be a part of the story somehow. But what it looks like for you to be a part of the story is going to look totally different for each of us. That's why we gather to remind ourselves of the story of the cross every single week, that's why we gather to worship and then meet Jesus together. That's why we meet him in song, we meet him at the tables with a bread and a cup where we symbolically retell this moment where the Hero absorbed our evil into Himself to overcome it and to save us.

And so, some of us, you know, we may need nothing more than just to meet with Jesus and let Him give us His fresh inspiration what we could do in our workplaces.

All right, you guys. Thanks for listening to this episode of The Strange Bible podcast. Again, if you find this podcast helpful for you or stimulating, pass it on to some friends or leave a review on iTunes. That helps viewers spread about it. And there you go, thanks for listening. We will talk again next time.