

“Thrive”: Forging a Vital Faith
From Insignificance to Purpose
Text: Genesis 2 (selected) and various
3.10.19



Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context... (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

“What kind of work did/do you do? How did you end up in that field? Was there something ‘else’ you would say you always wanted to do/try? Did you? If not, why not? Is it too late?”

“What kind of skills/abilities do you have that make/made you a good fit for your job? Do you think it’s also important to know what you are ‘not’ good at? Why?”

“Where is the place to which we have been called?” (Here) “Where’s here?” (Wherever you are present, presently)

“What do you think it means to “do everything as if you were doing it for Jesus?” (Colossians 3:23)

“What if people were not only called to plant ‘churches’, but ‘businesses’? What if Jesus-followers were to provide opportunity for others to find dignity in God-honoring labor?”

*“How does your **identity** show up in the way(s) you do your job?” (whose name is attached to your work?) How do you understand your vocation as your **mission**?”*

Respond to this statement:

I think we spend an inordinate amount of time waiting for our “calling”. Feeling like what we are doing, at present, is simply a ‘place-filler’ or some ‘spiritual probationary period’ before God gives you your ‘real’ assignment.

“What kind of story is your vocation telling?”

Teaching Notes...

What we have in the scriptures is not the quintessential works of God, for study, but the records of people who had an encounter with God which compelled them to call everything into question, so that their lives might be re-defined by and re-oriented around him.

Every time God calls us to something new, it means confronting (rejecting) all that is old and frustrating. It always incites within us both 'fear' and 'hope': hope not simply that things will be different, but that I can be different. Fear that I may be left without the resources to realize a different vision.

- We are currently in a consideration of a series of “transformational movements” which help to restore us to “full humanity” (the “welcome back to who you were always meant to be”).

From Insignificance to Purpose: We “image” God when we represent him and his desires well and live lives which make him attractive and available.

First jobs? How old were you? What did you do? How long did you last?

Interestingly, the prime-narrative for the Christian faith involves God delivering his people from a *really lousy work environment*.

God created us in an “orderly fashion”.

We were meant to thrive in an environment of functionality and beauty and provision and relationship. Our default response was shameless self-disclosure and validating personal presence. We were more conscious of God than we were “self-conscious”.

We have our origins in “blessing”.

Blessing is God’s framework for all of life. *“God blessed it...”*

blessing: *“the good that someone has decreed; to cause to flourish” and “the divine plan or reason”*

Blessing establishes both our “identity” and our “mission”.

We are reminded that we find out who we are only as we discover who he is. Our identity and significance and purpose are not to be discovered outside of ourselves (validation, career, financial portfolio, or sexual appeal) but are conferred upon us by our Creator.

What is God’s mission? It is the narrative which takes up most of the space between Genesis 3 and Revelation 22: from creation to new creation; from distortion to beauty.

Not a “different” world, but a world restored and refined so that it reflects its original intent.

In Genesis, we find humanity being commissioned to ‘tend to’ all that belongs to God. We are “expanding the garden”... “cultivating the sacred space”.

Humanity is “coming to life” in God in order to “breathe life” into every relationship and pursuit. For such a task, God will need to deploy people with various skills and varying interests, into cubicles, 24-hour fitness, classroom, board room, call center, nursery, etc., in order to transform the environment.

When we relegate faith to some private spiritual experience or some weekend ‘God-hobby’, we declare large portions of our faith irrelevant and limit our Kingdom influence.

It’s easy to assume that work was part of the “punishment” or an unwelcome interruption to an otherwise blissful existence: that before sin, the first couple sat around the garden naked sipping umbrella drinks and discussing how they might be able to retire in a place like this.

BTW: Genesis demonstrates for us that God’s original design is that we “work-from-home”!

Interestingly, the Hebrew word ‘*abad*’ is the same word used for both “**work**” and “**worship**” [Exodus 34:21; Joshua 24:15]. For God, work and worship were not mutually-exclusive.

There’s not “industry” and “ministry”. It’s not just “busy” work or “grunt” work, but “sacred work”, because it is connected with God. **This gives meaning and value to everything.**

“So, here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: take your everyday, ordinary life--- your sleeping, eating, going-to-work and walking-around life--- and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for your is the best thing you can do for him.”
Romans 12 (The Message)

“Why is it difficult for you to believe that your spreadsheets, your programming, your ‘pulling shots’, your bus-driving, your changing diapers is as much filled with the ‘glory’ of God (Presence) as the most inspiring worship gathering you have ever experienced?”

Our work becomes vocational as we are able to connect it with a larger mission. It dissuades us from de-personalizing our work and disconnecting it from faces and names and issues.

“vocation”- (Latin) ‘*calling*’

“Don’t just do the minimum that will get you by. Do your best. Work from the heart for your real Master, for God,…” Colossians 3:23

Our vocation is both a ‘revelation’ of who God is and an ‘expression’ of who we are.

It means you can’t just slap a “*Jesus Fish*” on the same old godless work-ethic and consider it “holy”! Imagine a scenario in which your boss doesn’t have to keep monitoring your activities because they are confident that you are ethical in the ways you function on your job.

A warning: work that is disconnected from glory quickly becomes a hot-bed for idolatry.

In Genesis 3, everything gets distorted. It gets riddled with thorns and relational challenges. Work, offered as an opportunity to share in the blessing, can become idolatrous when we attempt to find in it our significance and identity, or when we utilize it as an opportunity to flourish at the expense of another.

Vocation is the place of spiritual formation.

“*Love your enemies*” sounds easier here than when our enemies are the ones with whom we share a cubicle. “*Pray for those who gossip about you*” is one thing when you’re ignoring an FB post, but more challenging when they are the ones on our ‘team’.

There’s something about the environment in which you currently work that is broken and into which you are being called to “restore order”. There are ethical breaches. Relational tensions. Injustices in some of the company’s production strategies.

It should be normative for you to encounter God at work.

Have you ever prayed for someone at work? It’s a bit more challenging isn’t it, without the spiritual ‘mood music’. I noticed that people aren’t sure what to do. They don’t assume a ‘posture of receptivity’, as we call it. They just kind of stare at you. You don’t a 20-minute listening session. You’ve got about (45) seconds.

God’s intention, from the very beginning, was to lovingly preside over the world through his image-bearing and responsive humanity.

Once you have the “who” and the “why” resolved, the “what” will--- to a large extent--- take care of itself. It allows for the possibility of broad expressions which will somehow reflect God and resonate with you.