

“WORK AND REST” **(Genesis 1:29 – 2:3)**

As we continue our study of Genesis, this morning I want to talk to you about work and rest – two things we spend most of our day doing. They say that if you work 40 hours a week for 40 years of your life, then you will put in over 80,000 hours at a job during your lifetime. If you consider school to be work, then from kindergarten to high school you will put in another 15,000 hours preparing to work.

And then you throw rest in on top of that, and it is said that we spend between 20-30 years of our lives asleep. About 30 years of your life is spent like you are dead. Think of all that we could get done if we didn't have to rest. Why didn't God design us so that we didn't have to sleep?

Not only are these important topics due to the sheer time we spend working and resting, but also because we struggle to find satisfaction in them. Depending on what poll you read, between 63-85% of people say they hate their job, and 70 million Americans say they do not get enough sleep or have a sleep disorder of some kind. Added to that is an even deeper issue, and that is finding rest for our souls, so that we are able to live peacefully and joyfully. Since God designed so much of our lives to revolve around work and rest, how to we do both well, and how do all the hours we spend doing them fit into God's purpose for my life?

To answer these questions, we go back to the original design of creation, where we see that God – our creator – worked for six days and rested on the seventh. Being made in His image, God calls us to do the same... to both work and rest. In 1:29-31, after God created man on the sixth day, He assigns Him a work to do...

In 1:29-31 we read... God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

After making man in His image, God says, “As my image-bearers you reflect me. I work, and I want you to work.” This means that God has a plan and purpose for creation that He wants us to be a part of. God could do all the work Himself, but He delights in working through us to fulfill His purposes on earth. He gives

Adam and Eve are given two assignments. Assignment number is to be **“fruitful and multiply.”** Verse 28a says, “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number...’” God wanted Adam and Eve to have babies – babies that would bear His image and image-bearers that would go out and fill the earth with His glory. Here God sets the foundation of marriage and family – which we will talk about in chapter 2 – and the family unit will serve as the building blocks of what He wants to do in the world. Each family, someone said, is a mini-civilization and as the family goes, so goes civilization.

Don't miss the fact that having children is a blessing. This is not so much a command to have lots of kids as it is to say, "You are blessed to have been given children." Psalm 127:3, 5 says, "Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him... Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them." We live in a unique period of human history where kids are not always seen as a blessing, but an obstacle to personal goals, comforts, and conveniences. Raising children is the hardest job you'll ever have, but they are a gift from the Lord, and He wants us to celebrate each gift He gives us.

What about single people? When we come to the New Testament, the Apostle Paul says that being single is also a good thing. Paul was single, and so was Jesus. This alone tells us that it's not God's will for everyone to be married and have children. We also know that there are many couples strongly desire to have children, but are unable to do so.

No matter what state you find yourself in, the main idea here is that God wants to fill the earth His image-bearers, and the same language is used in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19 where Jesus says, "*Go and make disciples of all nations.*" In Acts 1:8 He commissions us to be His witnesses to "*the ends of the earth.*" He wants us to go out and fill the earth with people who are saved by the gospel of Christ and are conformed to His image.

Not only does God want us Adam and Eve to fill and multiply the earth, but He also wants them to **subdue it and rule over it**. Verse 28b says, "...fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." To "subdue" the earth means that we are to take command over it and take care of it. Every spring you subdue your yard and flower-bed – you dominate the grass and the weeds so that it doesn't dominate you. You bring order to chaos so that things can function well and thrive. This is what God did with the earth when He took what was formless and empty – and in a state of chaos – and over six days He brought order to it by forming it and filling it.

Along with subduing the earth, God says, "I want you to rule over it – you're in charge of the fish and the birds and the animals. You're in charge of taking care of the land and sea. I created it, now I'm entrusting you to take care of it." This means that while we take care of animals and treat them with respect, they do not rule over us – we are assigned to rule over them. While we are to take care of the planet and not pollute or abuse it, we rule over it. There is a fundamental difference between mankind and the rest of creation – we are made in the image of God and we rule according to His design.

From the very beginning, even before the fall where everything got messed up, God called us to work. You and I are created to work – we are created to do something – and to give it all we have. Colossians 3:23a says, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord..." This means if you are a student, give it all you have and be the best student you can be. If God has called you to stay home and raise the kids and homeschool, God bless you and do all you do for the glory of God. If you have an occupation, give it your best. If you're retired, God still has work for you to do for the kingdom, and use your time and energy to serve God.

One of the struggles we have in working is that we don't always see the value of our work. We look around and wish we had someone else's job or responsibility. But God is not so much concerned about *what* you do, but *how* you do it. In God's eyes all work He gives us to do is important and valuable – even the jobs we consider to be menial and lowly.

When I was in high school, a couple of friends and I would spend each spring break cleaning out a local farmer's irrigation ditch. They're not much glory in shoveling mud eight hours a day – the only fun part was slinging mud on each other. But in the big picture, my job had great value in that my humble work allowed the irrigation ditch to flow and supply water to the fields, which produced hay and alfalfa, which feed the dairy cows, which produced milk, which supplied a job for the truck driver who picked up the milk, and the people who worked at the processing plant, and those who stock it on the grocery shelves, and those who sell it to you so you can put milk on your cereal. Without me, you'd have no milk or cheese or ice cream.

God wants us to view all work that helps and benefits others as valuable and important. Your work may change throughout life, and because of your unique gifts and abilities you're able to assume greater responsibility and make more money – but wherever God has you right now, bloom where you're planted, and sling mud for the glory of God.

This is the same principle that the New Testament teaches about spiritual gifts – all gifts are important and valuable in the body of Christ. Doing the dishes after a potluck – remember those? – is just as important in God's eyes as me preaching a sermon. Just like digging a ditch is vital to the food chain, serving Christ by washing dishes or changing diapers in the nursery is just as valuable in God's eyes. Whatever God gives you to do, do it with all your heart, to the glory of God.

God not only designed us to work, but to **REST**. 2:1-3 says, “Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.”

We might read this and think that God, after creating the entire universe, is exhausted and needs rest – He needs a nap. But God doesn't sleep or slumber or grow weary – He's God. The rest that God takes is a rest of satisfaction and completion. He looks over all that He's created, sees that it is good and perfect, and says, “My work is done – it's finished,” and then He rests in the pleasure of His work. It's the same satisfaction we got when we came to the end of the ditch and removed our last shovel of mud. We went to the farmer who hired us and said, “It is finished – the work is complete.”

Although there is no command for us to rest in verses 1-3, there an implication that since God rests – and we are made in His image to be like Him – we too are to rest. Rest was built into the daily rhythm of creation in that we spend a third of our day sleeping – or at least sleep experts say we should get eight hours of sleep a night.

Later, when Israel is given the Ten Commandments, God commands them in the fourth commandment to set aside the seventh day of the week as a special, holy day – a Sabbath day – the word “Sabbath” meaning “rest.” In Exodus 20:8-11 we read, “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

Not only was the Sabbath day meant to be a day of physical rest, but it was also designed spiritually to teach God's people to *trust*. Before the fall, working and resting came naturally, but after the fall work became a burden, where we have to contend with thorns and thistles, and where we work hard but never seem to fully get things done. Do you ever feel that way? That you're always behind? The temptation is to work harder and longer... "Nothing's going to get done by sitting around," we tell ourselves. But God tells Israel, "Yes, work... I want you to work hard for six days, but I also want you slow down on the seventh as a way of saying, "God, I trust you. I'm going to relax and trust that the world will not stop spinning on its axis while I'm away, and I will trust you to meet my needs."

My dad was a wonderful example of doing this. In my early years he owned a ranch of over 200 acres and always, always had things to do. But he determined that one day a week – on Sunday – he was not going to do any ranch work other than the daily chores of feeding the animals and so forth. And every Sunday, no matter how much work he had left uncompleted – he spent the day going to church, playing with us, and relaxing. Our concern is that we'll get behind, but studies show that by taking time off to refuel, people are more productive, more energetic, and less frazzled.

God not only commanded Israel to rest every seventh day, but to give the *land* a Sabbath rest every seven years. They were not to plow or sow or reap, but trust God to bless them with a bumper crop the sixth year. But over the years, Israel failed to do this. Instead of letting the land lie fallow to regain its fertility, they worked the land to death, trying to get as much as they as they could out of it instead of trusting God. And they paid the price for this. God said, "If you won't let the land rest, I will," and He allowed Israel to be carried off into captivity for 70 years. Why 70? Israel failed to let the land rest for 490 years, which amounted to 70 Sabbath years they did not keep. This not only teaches the lesson of reaping what you sow, but the importance of trusting God by ceasing to work.

In the years leading up to Christ's coming to earth, the Jewish people said, "We don't want this kind of thing to happen again, so we have to make sure that we keep the Sabbath," and to make sure they were not violating it, they added hundreds and hundreds of legalistic demands for the Sabbath – you can't do this and you can't do that. By the time Jesus came the purpose of the Sabbath was completely lost in the minutia of rule-keeping.

On one occasion Jesus says something that completely changes the way we think about the Sabbath. One Sabbath, Jesus' disciples were hungry and picked some heads of grain to eat them. The Pharisees jumped all over them for violating their man-made rules for the Sabbath, and Jesus says, "I am the Lord of the Sabbath. I made the Sabbath and I decide what the rules are." But more than this, Jesus was declaring Himself to be the fulfillment of the Sabbath. The Sabbath and all its requirements looked forward to the coming of Jesus – who would provide permanent, spiritual rest for His people – which we will talk about in a moment.

I've been asked many times over the years if we're supposed to keep the Sabbath today, and the New Testament is clear that because Jesus fulfilled all the Sabbath requirements, we as the church are no longer bound to it. Paul makes this clear in Colossians 2:16-17 when he says, "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ." Jesus did not come to abolish the law – He came to fulfill it. And once He fulfills it, we are now bound not to follow Moses' law, but the law of Christ.

Does this mean that we shouldn't take a day off? Even though we're not bound to the Sabbath, isn't there still wisdom in keeping it? Absolutely. This is what my dad did in taking Sunday off, and throughout church history, Sunday became a special day because it was the day Jesus rose from the dead, and the early church met to worship on Sunday, which they called "the Lord's day."

During the French Revolution they outlawed Sunday as a day of rest. Within a few years they had to reinstate it – not for religious reasons but because the health of the nation had collapsed. They were all burnt out. Church gives us the spiritual rest and refreshment we need to survive the rest of the week. In church we hear uplifting music. We experience a different value system. Our hearts are quieted and softened. As we take a break from living in this world, we give our emotions an opportunity to rebound before we go back to our labors.

God does not command believers today to observe a Sabbath, but a day of rest is built into the fabric of creation, and whether it is on Sunday or some other day, it's important to cease working – not just to rest, but to trust God – to leave our work uncomplete and declare to God that we trust Him to meet our needs and take care of us.

The Bible teaches that in addition to physical rest, there is a deeper, more fundamental, meaning of rest that all the Sabbath laws pointed to – and that is *spiritual rest*. Jesus said, "Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Matthew 11:28-29).

More important than rest for the body is rest for the soul. The picture Jesus gives in these verses is that of a person burdened by the weight of sin. Adam and Eve were not burdened by this weight when God created them. They enjoyed an intimate, harmonious relationship with God, and His presence was with them in the garden. After they sinned, their fellowship with God was broken and they felt guilt and shame for their sin. Being descendants of Adam, we are all alienated from God and bear the burden of sin and guilt and sadness and loneliness.

People deal with their burdens in different ways. Some turn to addiction to numb the pain, some try to stay busy and avoid the pain. The Pharisees in Jesus' day turned to religious activity. They said that the answer to the human condition is to make yourself acceptable to God, to follow rules and regulations in order to be righteous. All this did was add more burden to already over-burdened people, and it deceived them into thinking they didn't need a Savior.

Jesus says, "All who are burdened down by sin and guilt – all who are weary of trying to find relief by your own futile efforts – come to me. I'm the answer. I'm the revelation of God, and I am the way to God." Doesn't that sound inviting and liberating? To "come" means that you respond to Jesus' revelation, you believe He is the answer to your burden of sin, you turn from your sin and turn to Him in faith.

When you come to Him, Jesus says, "I will give you rest – rest from the burden and guilt of sin." You simply say, "Lord, there is nothing I can do to remove my guilt – I trust you to remove it." On the cross Jesus took my sin and your sin upon Himself – He bore the load in our place – so that if you come to Him and trust Him as your Savior from sin, He forgives your sins and remembers them no more. The Bible says that the wrath of God, His heavy hand of judgment, hovers over sinners. But those who come to Him in faith are set free, they are no longer condemned, but completely forgiven. It's like taking off a hundred-pound backpack. You feel light and free, and you can rest.

Not only does Christ bring us permanent rest from the guilt of our sin and shame, but He gives us **ongoing, daily rest for the burdens of life**. Life is full of daily burdens – financial burdens, family burdens, marriage burdens, health burdens, emotional burdens – and these burdens create in us an inner turmoil. But in Christ you can be at peace and rest on the inside even when there is chaos on the outside – and it’s because the presence of Christ dwells in you, and any time you worry you go to God in prayer and trust Him with your problem.

Peter says, “Cast all your cares on Him, for the cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). Whenever you are burdened, go straight to the Lord and say, “Lord, you know the problems I face today, and I give you this burden to carry for me.” Isaiah 26:3 says, “You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.” After you cast your burden on the Lord, you rest... you trust Him to give you the wisdom and courage and strength to make it through the day.

Trusting in Christ also provides for us an **eternal rest when this life is over**. The author of Hebrews says, “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.” (Hebrews 4:9-10). On gravestones it is common to see the words, “Rest in peace.” By these words we wish the deceased person to enjoy rest from the struggles of this life and the peace that comes from being released from this life. We return to the world Adam and Eve knew before the fall.

Some people have the idea of heaven as being a place where all we do is nap and rest, but since God gave Adam and Eve work to do before the fall as His image-bearers, we will continue to work and set goals and accomplish things for the rest of eternity. The big difference, of course, is that our work will no longer be cursed. Randy Alcorn puts it this way, “Work in heaven won’t be frustrating or fruitless; instead, it will involve lasting accomplishment, unhindered by decay and fatigue, enhanced by unlimited resources. Our best workdays on the present earth—those days when everything turns out better than we planned, when we get everything done on time, and when everyone on the team pulls together and enjoys one another—are just a small foretaste of the joy our work will bring us on the new earth to come.”

God’s message to you and me today is this: Work hard and rest well. Whatever God gives you to do, give it all you’ve got. Even if your work seems tedious and insignificant, do all to the glory of God. Just as God calls us to work, He calls us to rest – to take time off to refuel and declare your trust in Him. Most importantly, He invites us to enter into His spiritual rest – to bring our burden of sin to Him and to find soul rest in Christ, who promises forgiveness to all who will come to Him in faith. Once you do, He promises ongoing, daily rest for the burdens of life until the day when He takes you home to your eternal rest in heaven, where you and I will continue to work for the glory of God.