



06

R e K n e w e d W o r k

“The Christian tradition has found it hard to maintain something the biblical authors view as a unity, namely that when God’s Spirit is at work, what it means is that humans are at work, who are so in tune with God’s will that it’s a marvel to behold. What we tend to do is separate them, and say that if God is at work, it’s at the expense of human involvement. But that’s never the way the Spirit works.”

— Tim Mackie, The Bible Project

“Work is not primarily a thing one does to live, but a thing one lives to do; the only Christian work there is, is good work well done.” — Dorothy Sayers

Willy Wonka's father was a *dentist*.

In 2005, the Roald Dahl classic “Charlie and the Chocolate Factory” was once again remade into a film — this time, starring Johnny Depp as the eclectic Willy Wonka. I didn't like it at first, but over the years it has grown on me, and I've grown to appreciate its genius.

Willy Wonka, the greatest candy-maker in the universe, runs a Chocolate Factory that is absolutely dazzling to behold. Chocolate waterfalls & rivers. Sticks of gum that taste — and fill you up — like a full Thanksgiving dinner. Armies of squirrels separating out good nuts from the bad ones. Wonderful, incredible, beautiful sights as far as the eye can see, more wondrous and amazing than anything you've ever seen!

And not only that, but the *candy* is incredible, too. He's world-famous for creating the most unbelievably delicious and inventive candies. He works hard; he travels the world looking for more and more exotic flavors. He invents things that defy the laws of chemistry and physics! All in the service of being *the very best in the entire universe* at making candy.

And yet, Willy Wonka feels like a failure.

His relationship with his father is strained — his father is a dentist, and poor Willy feels like his father *hates him and hates what he does for work*. How could he *not* feel like a failure? The most important figure of his formative years is *fundamentally disapproving of his passion, desire, and genius*.

I see this same tragic storyline play out in the lives of so, *so many* Christian men and

women.

I know swaths of brilliant designers, construction workers, architects, school teachers, pilots, housewives, househusbands, salespeople, entrepreneurs, doctors, chefs, authors, police officers and more *suffering in and through their work* — all because they think that what their *Father* wishes they would do is become *Pastors, Missionaries, or Evangelists*.

No matter how brilliant they are, no matter how dazzlingly wonderful their work is — they believe that God hates it, and so they spend their lives suffering through shame, feeling disconnected in their day-to-day life from the Father who — tragically *unknownst to them* — created them for that work in the first place.

Thank God this is not how He feels! There is so much to say, and so little space to say it. Let me summarize a bit of the teaching of the last chapters to set the tone for our study on work:

Since the New Creation is our eternal future, God wants us to live every second of our lives as though we are already there, and invite others into that same way of life through the Good News of the Kingdom secured by Jesus.

With that, let's turn back to Genesis 1 and revisit that thread we tugged on about the "Human calling". We're going to pull, and pull, and pull on it, until we see how far the rabbit-hole goes.

God-Approved Work

So, first off, what do I mean by work? Scratch that — better question: what does *God* mean by work?

We've begun this discussion already in the context of Human calling, but let's recapitulate a little bit.

God's *original idea* for humans was to make partners to aid Him in wisely ruling over the good world that God created. He created the humans by combining a little bit of Earth (dirt) with a little bit of Heaven (His Spirit) and then immediately commissioned them to do some things:

Be fruitful and multiply.

Fill the earth.

Subdue it (and help me take it somewhere!)

Let's pause here and do a bit of thinking through the implications.

I want you to know that if you are a parent, if you are raising up a family, you are doing job #1 on human's job description.

I hate it when people ask me if my wife works. Or if they say something stupid like "what does your wife do for work?" And then I tell them "she's an incredible wife, mother, and homeschool teacher!"

Then, almost without fail, they'll say "Oh, so you're the only one that works?"

That is nothing less than an insult to my wife. The fact of the matter is that a lot of the time, she works harder than me! *You* try raising those little savages we call children into productive and God-fearing adults every single day and tell me if it's "work" or not!

What's more, she's working on things that God finds *totally and utterly* important. She focuses her time and energy right here at the top of God's plan for human work. It was once said "Children are not a distraction from more important work. They are the most important work."

I want you to understand this - if you're a parent and a spouse and you *don't* have a job that people pay you for, God is nevertheless *utterly thrilled* with your work. And you *are* working!

And you are doing things that are indispensable for a good, Garden-like world. Keep it up!

People rarely think about their contribution to the world in terms of the *people* they contribute to the world. Your children are one of the most profound bits of legacy that you can contribute to a Garden-like world. Raise Garden-like humans and you will be partnering with God every step of the way.

As for filling the earth, we of course remember that this refers to going out to create societies and civilizations. That will be important in just a moment here, but for now I really, *really* want to dive deep into the word "subdue", which is where we will find all

of the *rest* of the work that God wants us to do.

A Beautiful, Possible Future

In the Garden, do you think that music had been discovered yet? In the Garden, do you think that Adam and Eve had refined cooking techniques? Had they discovered the French mother sauces, or the Mexican recipe for “mole”? In the Garden, had Adam and Eve discovered yet how to build a house? Had anybody invented the 2-by-4 or the brick? Had anybody invented math yet? Did they know how to work with metal and stone? Were Adam and Eve engineers who knew the principles of lift, thrust, drag, and weight such that they could design airplanes?

One of the rare *differences* in the first 2 pages of Scripture and the last 2 pages are that the beginning state is a state of *infinitely unrealized potential*, and the ending state is one of *actively, infinitely realizing potential*.

In the beginning, God creates this incredible world full of all kinds of life and *raw materials* - there’s a whole passage in Genesis 2 about how good the gold is, where you can find good onyx stone, where the good milk and honey are. . .

When God says “subdue this place”, he’s telling Adam and Eve “Hey, there are forests, rivers, metal, sun, wind, soil, rain, plants — *do something* with it! Make things! Plant crops, build houses, design computers, make music, create art, come up with technology, build homes!”

Pastor Tim Keller put it this way:

Work is “rearranging the raw materials of God’s creation in such a way that it helps the world in general, and people in particular, thrive and flourish.”

That’s incredible, isn’t it? I love that definition.

How did God make Adam to do that? For that, we will actually arrive at our first usage of the word “work” in the Old Testament:

[15] The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. - Genesis 2:15 ESV

God is said to put Adam in the garden so that he can work it and take care of it. “Work”, here, is the Hebrew Word “abad”, meaning “service”.

So, work is supposed to serve God, serve others, and serve the earth itself. But amazingly, this same word is used elsewhere in the Old Testament for “worship!” They’re 2 ways of translating the same word. If you have a view of work that takes Genesis into account, what you do for work is part of how you worship God!

What *incredible* potential there was for God’s good world in the beginning!

But, as we’ve seen time and again in this story, the good times only last for 2 pages. And what happens on page 3 in your Bible? The fall. Of course. Again.

But this time, let’s actually go to that passage and look at it, too:

[14] The LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go,

and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. [15] I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

Genesis 3:14–15 ESV

This is NOT saying that because of what the serpent did, now women and children hate snakes.

No, what God is promising the serpent, who is our enemy the devil, is this: you and your children will be at war with humans and their children.

“Someday, there will come a man who crushes your head. And you’ll bite him back, but I am pronouncing this curse on YOU, not them - and I will have the last laugh.”

And so the humans fell. But this raises a few questions:

Did they stop being made in God’s image? No.

Did work exist before the fall? Yes! Was it good? Yes!

Is it harder now because of the curse pronounced on men and women? Yes!

Is childbearing harder now because of the curse pronounced on women? Yes!

Don’t miss that. Children are not a curse, but childbearing is now *cursed with pain and difficulty*.

In the same exact way, work itself is not a curse. Work is not a consequence of the fall. Work is what you were made for, and it was only made more *difficult* by the fall.

But the point is clear: the Garden was made *perfectly*, but it was not made *complete*. All was *potential*, and *future*, and *hope-filled*. God hid beautiful potential into the very fabric of the Universe. The ending of the story — and the beginning of eternity — looks much the same, but now the progress of fallen humanity has been *redeemed* on the face of the Earth. All of our good ideas are restored and folded into the goodness of God's created order. Even our cultures continue on!

But let's go back to the beginning once more - because humans, after all, are not the *only ones* working on pages 1 & 2 of the Scriptures. And the *other worker's* job is *endlessly* fascinating.

God's Work

Earlier, I mentioned that the Hebrew *word* for work appears first in Genesis 2, and it was used to describe what Adam did in the garden.

And that's true! But the first *description* of work is from literally the first verse in the entire Scripture:

■ “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” - Genesis 1:1 ESV

From the very, *very* beginning, *God himself was working*.

As we go throughout the story, what are some of the things that we see God doing for

work?

Creating Good Things — Everything God does is *good*. Not just “a job well done” at something that doesn’t matter — *the thing itself* is “good, valuable, and worthy.”

Creating Order & Beauty — God is seen doing this usually by separating things from other things: separating the waters above from the waters below, separating the land from the waters, separating the light and the darkness, creating the dry land, and giving them all names.

Making Life & Making Life Flourish — He fills the sky, sea, and land with creatures that are designed to thrive in that environment - and He gives them all *more than enough to swarm and teem with life*.

God acts as an inventor, an architect, an artist, a designer, a builder, a doctor, a midwife, an accountant, a professional organizer, and millions of other things in the process of creating the cosmos!

All of it was *intrinsically good*, made *according to His Wisdom and Will*, *beautifully ordered*, *flourishing with life*, and *bubbling over with potential and possibility*.

Then the stupid humans (sorry, A&E) reject partnership with this Creative God and instead choose to rebel against His wonderful plans for the world. *And God immediately gets to work fixing that, too*.

He pronounces a curse on the evil one that came and deceived our first parents, vowing to exact Holy Vengeance on the forces of evil.

So we are left with this list of 3 beautiful things that God does for work:

1. Creating Order & Beauty
2. Making Life & Making Life Flourish
3. Vanquishing Evil

Brothers, I have some excellent news for you:

If your work is contributing in any way to those 3 goals, you are partnering with God to do the things that He finds important. You are collaborating with God in creating a more Garden-like world.

Oh, goodness. *Oh my goodness, my dear friends.*

If you create beauty out of ugliness or raw materials — if you create order where there was chaos — if you contribute to the existence of life — if you create new ways for life of *any kind* to flourish — if you contribute to the overthrow of evil in the world — or if you create *anything* that is good and right and beautiful. . .

Then your Father in Heaven *is not* looking at your work with scorn or hatred, like a dentist at the work of a chocolatier. He is not scoffing and putting your work down. He is not angry with you for having chosen *wrongly*.

He stands next to you — one hand on your shoulder, with a paintbrush, pen, gavel, hammer, frying pan, stethoscope, fresh diaper, microphone, or computer mouse in the other hand — and says “*Wow. Well done, my good and faithful servant! That is how it’s done!*”

Rejecting God's Design

Why should we be surprised that we've gotten this wrong? It wouldn't be the first time that we've needed to totally reframe what God intends for humanity in light of the beginning and end of the story.

Our former dualist understanding has done us *no favors* when it comes to reconciling our work with God's plans for the universe. If we assume that what is Spiritual is good and what is Physical is, at best, temporary — and at worst, evil — then we will have no philosophical grounds on which to build a belief that *anything* matters aside from so-called church work.

But we have just learned very clearly from the Scriptures that *all work matters*, not just “church work”. As a pastor, the line of thinking that says “all that matters is what *I'm* doing” *infuriates me* — it's perpetuated in large part by insecure pastors poring over the Scriptures with motivated reasoning, looking for ways to elevate their own view of their own work, doing the unkind and selfish thing of pushing other people down instead of building one another up in love. We ought to be ashamed!

As a pastor & teacher myself, I have learned to get very comfortable with what I am about to say to you. It might still make some of you uncomfortable, but it must be said:

In both the first and the last chapters of the Scriptures — once again, that is to say in the ideal state of the universe — there is no evangelism, no missions, no preaching, no church services, no tracts, no pamphlets, no door-knocking, none of the activities that pastors undertake in pursuit of ministry. *It's not the painter or the artist that loses his*

job, it's the pastor and the missionary.

That is *not* to say that God isn't also *thrilled* with pastors and missionaries - they simply have a job which is *also* contributing to the world that God wants to create, same as anybody else who works like God does.

And, maybe more importantly, *we have pushed far too much responsibility for the actual "ministry work" onto the guy with the suit behind the pulpit.* We will cover this in a later chapter, maybe my favorite in the whole book.

But for the time being, let me give you a few words of advice when it comes to thinking through your career, passions, and choices in a way that *embraces* God's design rather than *rejecting it*.

If your work matters to God, then there are a few things you can't do.

You can't take a terrible job that doesn't advance God's Will in the world just because it makes you a lot of money that you can give away. God isn't happy with that situation. It's better to partner with God by creating beauty & order, vanquishing evil, and making life flourish! Your work ITSELF can be partnering with God. You need to learn to live like this!

You can't do something that counteracts God's Will for the universe. If your work deals death, creates destruction, wreaks havoc, sows discord, breeds confusion, foments division, slanders other image-bearers, or contributes in any other way to a *more broken* world, then you are partnering instead with the accuser, the slanderer, the great divider, the evil one, the enemy who is beneath the dignity of naming.

Some people have included military or policing work in this regard. I reject that view adamantly. Military work, when done right, is a way of *maintaining peace and order while vanquishing evil at the same time*. Of course, that depends upon a more-or-less just government. . . . But if Paul can say even of the Roman government that they “*do not bear the sword in vain*” but are instead “*God’s agents for justice and peace*”, then I am comfortable joining him to extend my gratitude to the brave men and women who enlist in the military or in law enforcement to do the Lord’s work. To take on the mantle of such daring work is to take a bold and profound stand on hope, justice, and righteousness!

You can’t be lazy, a sluggard, a layabout, or a fool in your work. Work is hard no matter what you do under the sun, and we as Christians shouldn’t be “get-rich-quick” people. We should be “elbow-grease” people, “love-the-Lord-in-all-you-do-with-all-you-have” people. Remember Paul’s words — “whatever you do, do it for the Lord, and not for men — because you know that God will give you the inheritance as a reward.”

If you knew that not only would “good work well done” earn you a paycheck in this life, but also a *hundredfold reward in the next*, would that change how you would feel about outworking your coworkers?

Christians should be *the hardest workers* by far — unbelieving business owners should say “I don’t know if I believe what they believe, but my God, all the people I hire from that church down the street are my best workers!”

We will unpack this all a little more later, but this will do for a short preface into the next section.

Let's start to unpack each of those 3 broad categories of work, starting with creating Order & Beauty.

Creating Order & Beauty

This is one of the areas of work that has been under the most attack by the old “dualist” framework. If you think that the world is going to burn up and be destroyed, or that the physical order of things is fundamentally sinful and broken and wrong, then *boy oh boy, do you have a hard time with ordering the world and creating beauty.*

But, fundamentally, if you're an artist, an architect, a singer, a painter, a landscaper, an author, a spoken-word poet, a home builder, a designer, a videographer, a photographer, an interior designer, a carpenter of any kind, if you design video games, if you build websites. . . and you know what, even when you're cleaning up your own house, folding laundry, and mowing the lawn — you are creating beauty and order and structure and function just like God the Father, Jesus, and the Spirit were all doing at the beginning.

In the beginning, the Lord was seen creating the entire universe by His own words, ordering and naming things, defining things as different from other things.

You're just like Jesus, who was not only there in the beginning with the Father, but was himself an artist, a carpenter, and a stoneworker in human life.

I doubt you know this, but this is incredible: the first person to be “filled with the Spirit” in the Bible was actually an artist and a craftsman.

■ “[1] The LORD said to Moses, [2] “See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri,

son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, [3] and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, [4] to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, [5] in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft.” - Exodus 31:1-5 ESV

God fills the craftsman Bezalel with His Spirit to go out and design the tabernacle. He fills this man with wisdom and knowledge of how to work in wood, gold, and precious stones.

Strangely, some Christians think that making “fancy” and beautiful things out of expensive materials is wasteful or sinful or evil or bad stewardship. Apparently God disagrees!

The first person He *ever* filled with His Spirit did just that. So if you are creating beauty & order, God looks at your work and says “well done!”

A Small Example

I have a soft spot for this category of worker, because I fit here, myself.

I started my professional life as a Game Designer. I would design all of the systems, the interactive elements, the story, and everything that would go into a video game. I took on a bunch of computer programming as well, even going so far as to freelance programming on the side. Then I learned how to make websites, write sales pages, design logos, and all of that — which I still do to this day.

I’d like to give you an *example*, using my own work, of how you can contextualize this

way of thinking into your own work.

I own an agency called “Growth Sites”. I saw a lot of things in the design and marketing industries that I thought were legitimately *unjust*. Once, I read the story of the car rental company Hertz paying *\$32 Million* to a web design firm for a car rental website — and after *years*, they still couldn’t release the thing. So Hertz sued them to get all their money back, and Accenture spent *more time* fighting a legal battle to *keep the money they hadn’t earned from their terrible work*.

Selfishness, robbery, laziness, incompetence, division, lack of consideration, and falsehood as far as the eye can see. It was called “the website redesign from hell” and I laughed — ironically, they had no idea how right they were. Every one of those negative traits is a hallmark of work that is set on fire by hell.

So, we went against every single one of those things — we invested hundreds of thousands of dollars into research and development so that we could get the process for our clients down to 7 days — if God can make the entire Universe in 7 days, then I can surely turn around a beautiful website in that much time if I’m committed enough!

Here are a few of the other things we’ve changed in light of the beginning and end of Scripture:

Business Strategy — The fact of the matter is that if I am helping a person completely rethink their place in the universe, understand the deep things of God, and put words and structure and motivation behind their work, their rest, the way they manage their relationships, the way they handle difficulties, the way they move through life and move forward and make sense of the Gospel and the Bible and pray and thank

God for His goodness. . . the chances are good that a person who owns a business and has undergone that same transformation with me will recognize that their current business practices aren't cutting it.

For example, a person who is lying in their marketing, settling for a bad customer experience, selling lackluster products because they don't want to invest in improving them, someone who struggles through feeling abundant when the resources they currently have on hand don't match the fullness of the vision they have for transforming the world. . . could use some help re-thinking their work.

And yes, they might take risks that end up failing or not paying off - but the fact of the matter is that the New Creation dwarfs any setbacks, problems, issues, worries, fears, concerns, or difficulties we could possibly conjure to describe the life of someone in this age.

But entrepreneurial thinking and robust problem-solving doesn't come from a place of fear, curmudgeonliness, double-mindedness, fear, and worry. It comes from a place of radical belief, of bravery, of generosity, of open-mindedness to other solutions, of confidence, faith, and determination.

And ALL of the latter list only comes to you when you have robust hopes for your future - when you feel taken care of, capable, equipped, called, protected, and destined. In Christ, you are all of those things.

Brand Design — Brand Design changes radically. In a double-minded world of brazen self-interest, committees are cobbled together to study “what will make a person respond to a particular angle or approach.” They craft insincere representations

- masks to try to win your dollar. Like makeup, trying to draw you in by obfuscating or denying the reality of what they truly are underneath.

For us, everything revolves around digging deep into your God-given brilliance and then pointing a mirror at it. You were made for something that you will be doing for all of eternity. You are destined for something absolutely incredible and the life that you're living now is simply an earlier point on that continuum.

You have been re-made - and so the very thing that you do to contribute to the shaping of God's world must be presented in a newer, more purposeful way. You simply need to step into the new identity that you have as a remade human, a brand new child of God, and take on that identity in your business as well. You need to BE your brand. Your brand is merely an extension of your new identity.

Web Design — Honestly, I believe God is a fan of new technologies. First of all, I think He loves human innovation for its own sake — when humans take His raw materials and invent technologies that enable things that were formerly impossible to become possible, I think that thrills Him beyond belief. But not only that, the Good News of the arrival of God's Kingdom also makes itself known through every technology known to man.

The growth of the church was built upon the strategic use of the Roman roads and the delivery of letters for its promulgation. As technology progressed, so too did the advancement of the Good News - and the impact of the Good News itself.

The printing press, the radio, the television, the car, the airplane - everything humans have done in the advancement of technology has been utilized to spread the gospel of

the Kingdom.

Today that technology is the Internet.

And for your own slice of the Kingdom, the thing that you were carved out of the dirt to do, your task will be best accomplished if you are partnering with God in the usage of technology to accomplish it. What you do matters, how you present the message matters, and the impact that you want to make is often on the other side of brilliant, purposeful, strategic use of technological wonders.

Well designed websites and online tools are unbelievably powerful in this day and age. If you have a solution that is better, that makes the world look more like a garden - you are obligated to do the best that you can in spreading the good news.

Online Marketing — Online Marketing hardly looks the same at all. First, marketing in general is usually done with a substandard product or a lackluster one, to try and gussy it up and present it as the solution that matters, with none of the drawbacks of its competitors. This is positioning. Where, in the market, do you fit?

In this case, marketing for our clients looks like reflecting the internal consistency and the integrity of the product and service, the actual differentiated value that it produces, and presenting that to the world.

This can be done organically, with teaching and speaking to those within your circle of influence. This can be done at scale with paid advertising, where you position your product or service in front of many people at once.

But the main differentiating factor in this equation is love: **whoever loves the most, wins.**

If you truly love your neighbor as yourself, and you desire to help them, then you will do whatever you can to lead them into a more garden-like world. The work that you do matters because you're able to battle back the disorder and the decay.

So now - if that's what you're doing, whatever will be the right way to get the message out will present itself immediately. And the best tools that we have to achieve that in this day and age are those that pertain to marketing automation.

What we want is an effective, low-friction, love-focused, automated marketing system that is structured around the best possible way to guide your prospects through the process of learning that your solution is the one-of-a-kind thing that they desperately need — or, to discover that it is not for them, as fast as possible, so that they can turn around and find the right thing. Either way contributes to a more garden-like world!

If anybody has read this far, and you own a business, *you're probably the ideal person for me to work with.* This isn't why I wrote this book, but if you like what I've had to say so far and you want some help rethinking your business, you can always reach out to talk to me about it. Just go to <https://theoverlap.life/book-work> and we can get started!

I hope you can see the kind of thinking that went into our business decisions. There are so often empty platitudes like “make God the CEO of your business” or “work like God is your boss” or “pray like it depends on God, work like it depends on you” —

that just don't actually pass for good business advice, and certainly don't take you any closer to doing work that matters.

These empty platitudes exist because it's hard to progress in your work if you don't think your work ultimately matters - and you'll never be able to think very *deeply* about how to integrate it with your faith if you are convinced that your faith is *fundamentally opposed to your work*.

All we need is a . . . *reknewed*... view of work. Sorry for all the puns. Actually, no. I'm not sorry. What about folks who make life or make life flourish?

Making Life & Making It Flourish

"Making Life" is a bit of a misnomer for the human side of this work. Honestly, our attempts at "creating" life by ourselves have been . . . laughable. If there are any "materialistic origin of life scientists" who are reading this book, I am sorry for the insult — but that line of work is absolutely a joke.

"Origin of Life" science is the attempt to explain — without God or a Creator of any kind — where the first life came from. How all the chemicals, molecules, elements, and other random lifeless particles of the ancient world somehow coalesced into the first "living thing".

The math dwarfs you. Even if you allow for a 14.2 billion year old earth, the amount of time required to *randomly* fold even *one single useful amino acid or protein fold* is vanishingly small. Much less billions or trillions of them, much less billions or trillions of them that can organize themselves into something sentient and self-reproducing. All of

this without having to give an account for where *the universe itself* came from in the first place — leaving that (equally difficult to explain) bit of science to the cosmologists.

The point is — making life is *hard*. So while we don't *make* life, we sure can partner with God in making life flourish!

I think of the maternity nurses, the various kinds of doctor, the orderlies, the anesthesiologists, the doulas, midwives, and birth coaches who are all responsible for the smooth arrival of a newborn baby into our world. They didn't make the life — God, the mother, and the father did all that — but they are instrumental in the safe arrival of this new life into the world to fulfill their own God-given purpose!

The same thing goes for veterinarians and nature conservationists — if we believe that God is going to renew this place and we want to work towards that, it ought to change how we view these things as well. I'm not prescribing or proscribing any sort of political view — I just want us to think and prioritize along God's lines of thought.

I use the word flourishing intentionally. When God created the earth, He didn't simply create a bare, gray, functional and utilitarian landscape filled with monochromatic plants that tasted bland and merely filled our stomachs. That's "subsistence", not "flourishing".

Flourishing, by contrast, is *colorful*, abundant, beautiful, satiating, filling, satisfying, fulfilling, expanding, growing, healthy, vigorous, vibrant, and thriving. I don't know about you, but even our *fallen* world looks like that as often as not. Watch a beautiful nature documentary on the coral reefs, the African savannah, or the creatures in the mountains — how much more thriving must there have been in the beginning? The

trees were pleasing to the eye and good for food. Colors and variety and creativity everywhere!

So, anywhere you contribute to the ease, flourishing, growth, satisfaction, righteous pleasure, and happiness of humans & other creatures in the world, you are contributing not just to the subsistence of life, but to its flourishing.

If you make hard things easier, bad things good, uncomfortable things comfortable, hungry people full, sick people healthy, weak people strong, broken things fixed, dirty things clean, dangerous things safe, and things that used to be impossible into things that are possible - like flying in an airplane, calling somebody on a telephone, or automating something very difficult and tedious - you are helping life to flourish.

My family and I went to Universal Orlando a couple of years ago for a big family vacation. It was *surely* one of the most startlingly wonderful experiences I've ever enjoyed on God's green earth. I thought often of how much planning, how much design, how much effort, how much work went into making such a beautiful place!

One of the days we were there, we were able to go to their water park an hour before the rest of the visitors could enter. Their water park is called Volcano Bay, and it's designed to look like a beautiful Polynesian Island.



My view. Also pictured, my happy place.

Everywhere you turn, there are beautiful things to see. Music plays on hidden speakers throughout the park that fills your ears with island music.

They even developed little wristbands with computer chips in them, which allow you to simply tap your wristband to get in line at a ride, make a cave system light up with what looks like phytoplankton, or even playfully squirt water out of the mouth of a Moai statue at the people floating down the lazy river.

Think of all the work that goes into this kind of place! Think again of the designers, think of the concept artists, think of the manufacturers of the umbrellas, think of the horticulturists and landscapers who shaped that land to look like a beautiful island

with palm trees and flowering shrubs!

This might sound blasphemous, but I'm reminded again of Bezalel — the designer who created the tabernacle. Remember, the tabernacle was decorated with fruit trees, angels singing, gold, spectacular jewels, and the finest of materials?

Volcano Bay, to me, feels like one of the most Garden-like places on Earth.

I think in the New World that the amazing wonders that God has created for us in his world will look to us like one gigantic playground. I can't wait to get my feet wet in the river of the water of life, paraglide across the fjords of Norway, bungee jump into the Grand Canyon, climb Mt. Everest.

You could *never* convince me to do anything crazy like that now — people are too fragile, and one thing that goes wrong spells the end for you! But in a renewed body? Bring on the flourishing!

God doesn't want His people living like ascetics in a monastery, denying themselves every good thing in the name of lofty piety. He wants His children to roam the beautiful places of the earth and give Him the glory and gratitude and amazement for the beautiful things that He has made!

And God *loves* when His children create more of these things — because they make our lives look more like the garden.

Vanquishing Evil

We turn now to the group of people who I think deserve *serious* praise for their bravery and boldness: those whose work is centered on vanquishing evil.

If you're a police officer whose desire is to protect and serve, if you're a social worker who works tirelessly to get children out of abusive homes, if you work in the military fighting to protect your people and promote peace in the world, if you're a detective, a lawyer, a judge, a whistleblower, or a journalist — although these days, there are not many good journalists — then you are working with God to a profound degree.

You are exposing evil wherever it can be found in the world *through your work*, and you are bringing it to justice. It takes a bold person to choose this path, but God LOVES it when His children promote justice and righteousness in the world.

What can we say? God hates evil more than any of us, and He plans in the future to deal with it permanently. There will be no stone left unturned in that day, when God comes to judge the world. Judge doesn't simply mean to *punish*, either. He will come to *set it right*.

That is what is actually at work in the heart of a Christian who has chosen to battle against injustice. What they want is a *putting right of things*.

The Hebrew word for peace is "*shalom*" — and it doesn't simply mean a "lack of violence or chaos" as much as there is — once again — *flourishing* in its place.

In the Scriptures, there is peace when rival Kingdoms are not only *not fighting*, but

working together for one another's mutual benefit.

In that way, I see the Vanquishing of Evil and the Creation of Flourishing as two sides of the same coin in a lot of ways — you can create flourishing in places where there is evil *only once you have rooted out the evil.*

I think of the incredible people on the front lines combating the worst that Spiritual evil has to offer - things like human trafficking, drug trades,

Evil takes many forms — think of the ancient Biblical images of Egypt. When you look at Egypt, is it Pharaoh, the system, or the Spiritual evil behind him that is “evil?” The correct answer is *all of it.*

If you work against corrupt *people*, you are vanquishing evil.

If you work against corrupt *systems*, you are vanquishing evil.

If you work against corrupt *Spiritual powers*, you are vanquishing evil.

In the Scriptures, they always go hand in hand - the evil behavior of humans (who are being held *captive* by the real enemies) is always connected with the spiritual rebels who hate God and His plans for the universe. They are at work in anything that drags God's good creation back into chaos, darkness, and lifelessness.

And God thinks that it is so important that He plans to, one day, fully and finally finish the job.

In fact, the *finishing of that job* has already begun. The Scriptures say that when Jesus

rose from the dead, He *humiliated the Spiritual powers, stripped them of their authority, and exposed them to public shame.*

When they crucified Jesus, they had dealt *themselves* the death blow, and sealed their own doom.

Evil is *on the run now, brothers.* Their days are numbered and they know it. So they went from trying to *win*, to trying to take down as many of God's good creatures *with them* before their time is fully up.

God needs His children everywhere — and He wants them on the front lines of the fight to make the world more like the Garden.

Working for God's Kingdom

Humans were meant to rule with God from the beginning - making more of ourselves, spreading over the whole Earth, and partnering with God to cultivate the potential it holds to take it someplace wonderful. And if we're going to do it like God does it, we are going to be creating *good* things, doing *good* services, and expanding on *good* ideas. And when we do, it will look like creating order & beauty, making life & making life flourish, and battling back the forces of evil.

Especially as *New Humans*, the kinds that God has remade in Jesus — this vocation has been restored to us! We have once again been placed on the holy line that transcends the mess and evil of this world, connecting the reason for which we were made in the beginning with the future toward which we strive.

Let's peek into that *future* of work next. We've talked about work here and now in light of the work we see in the first few chapters of Scripture — but what do we see in the *end* when we think about the future of work?

First, I'd like to talk about the 3 *ends* of work. Either your work is **completed**, your work **continues on**, or your work is **burned up**.

Completed Work

Whose work is *completed* in the New Creation? I think about friends of mine who are doctors, judges, lawyers, police officers, or nurses.

If you're a nurse or a physician, your service will no longer be needed in the New Creation. It's done — everyone there is healthy beyond your wildest reckoning.

But there's something really wonderful about that, isn't there?

After all, the reason that your work is *done* in the New Creation is because God gave you the thing that you were working for your entire career!

A doctor wants his patients to leave the office healthy, in good shape, with no health problems, able to live a good life in a body that works. God doesn't think that's *unimportant*. . . truly, he thinks it's so important that He will complete the job *for* you in the New Creation! He's working on it, too!

If you're a good lawyer or a good judge in this life, it's because you are battling for justice to be served. You want to defend the innocent, incriminate the guilty, see those

who suffer injustices be restored, and to see those who do evil be punished. Does God think that's important? Of course He does. That's why He finishes your work. He's working on it, too!

You get to walk into the New Creation knowing that you have received *everything* that you've ever worked for. It's done. It is yours. The thing you worked so hard for your whole life has *arrived in fullness*. Can you imagine that moment?

Everyone whose work falls in the "Vanquishing Evil" category lands here. All Ministry work is here too, more or less. There is no more need to carry on the ministry of reconciliation once the reconciliation has been completed!

God finishes, completes, fulfills, and permanently establishes what you worked for all your career, and gives it back to you, forever.

Continuing Work

Whose work continues on in the New Creation?

Well, let's look back at what God does. He creates beauty & order. He creates life & makes it flourish. And he vanquishes evil.

We just covered that evil is completely done away with in the New Creation.

There's *also*, as far as I understand, *no new life* emerging in that state — that's not a guarantee, but it seems to me as though all of the infinite beings living in eternal life, unable to die — it doesn't seem like more needs to be done to create life! I'd be delighted

to be proven wrong, and I have no idea what that would even look like.

But we *do* know for sure that 2 kinds of work will continue on: the kind that *makes life flourish* and the kind that *creates order & beauty*.

Chefs, musicians, architects, builders, inventors, artists, designers, storytellers, authors, and folks like that will stay very busy. And all the people who spent their lives on work that gets *completed* will also get to enjoy learning how to play the cello, becoming a master painter, crafting wines, etc. There will be plenty of time to pick up a new career!

Burned Up Work

This is not a happy ending for your work.

“[11] For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. [12] Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—[13] each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. [14] If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. [15] If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.” - 1 Corinthians 3:11–15 ESV

Jesus Christ is the foundation for our lives *now*, but *especially* our eternal lives.

If what you build on top of that foundation is good, like we just talked about - you’ll

receive a reward for your hard work!

But — if it gets burned up when it gets tested — you'll still be *saved*, but *just* barely getting through the flames!

I understand the attitude of “I’m just grateful to be here”, but what God wants from His children is good, solid, partnership in things that matter to Him; He certainly does *not* want to see our work go up in smoke when He brings the cleansing fire to purify this world.

There are a million ways to see your work caught up in smoke. If you are *bad* at what you do, if you are lazy, if your attitude is bad — but *especially* if you do something that is *bad* for humans.

If you do something that is outright sinful and evil and wrong, that’s obviously not something God can reward.

If you are a payday lender that puts poor people into danger with loans that you know they can’t pay back. Or, if you’re a master burglar. Or, if you create food that just makes people fat and unhealthy and sick. Or, if you’re a politician who is primarily focused on your own career advancement and not on representing the people who elected you. . . all of that stuff is going up in flames.

And you’ll be welcomed into God’s Kingdom still, because it is Christ’s work and not yours that *saves you* — no other foundation can be laid but the one that *already* exists for the believer. But God will probably look at you and say “well, you could have done better.”

Who wants to hear **that**?

I think we would all prefer to hear “Well done, my good and faithful servant. Come, and enter into your master’s happiness.” Let’s do our work well.

Good Work Well Done

Dorothy Sayers once said “The church’s approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him not to be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours and to come to church on Sundays. What the church *should* be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables.”

I love that quote. I seriously doubt that anybody in Nazareth would have taken Jesus seriously if he made terrible, shoddy, flimsy tables with the little Jesus fish and Bible verses carved into them. I also seriously doubt that if anybody SAW those shoddy tables, that they would believe they were made by the same hands that formed Heaven and Earth.

Doing good work — trending ever in the direction of *mastery* — is one of the main ways you do your work for God.

That’s going to mean different things for different people. It means something *very different* to be a master “1st grade teacher” than it does to be a master “pilot”. For the pilot, your job is basically “land the plane without killing anyone.”

Obviously that’s a difficult thing to do — I can’t do that! But that’s the pilot’s main goal, and should he do so consistently over the course of his career, he might be said

to have attained “mastery”.

But a master grade school teacher, a master artist, a master builder, a master singer - those all mean *completely* different things. I’m not trying to lay a yoke on you and make you feel as though you need to *work harder and harder to become a master right away* - no, we don’t want to give ourselves over to workaholism or anxious toil.

The Japanese have a word that I absolutely love: “shokunin”. It literally means ‘craftsman’ or ‘artisan,’ but such a literal description does not fully express the deeper meaning.

The Japanese apprentice is taught that shokunin means not only having technical skills, but also implies an attitude and social consciousness. The shokunin has a social obligation to work their best for the general welfare of the people.

But it honestly goes further even than *that*. Beyond the social consciousness, the knowledge that your work contributes to the betterment of the world in some way, beyond all of that...

It’s a whole-life, multi-faceted commitment to sheer excellence.

When we think “craftsman”, we think of something like an Italian guitar-maker (luthier) taking a year in a beautiful valley cabin with some choice pieces of wood...

Clamping here, shaping there, lovingly brushing some stain along the neck...

There’s a very luxurious, sensual slowness to all of it that just makes our hearts ache here in the west. The shokunin asks “why is it taking so long? And why is he away from

his family?”

So... do you love *what* you do?

Do you love *how* you do it? Do you love *who* you do it for?

Do you have a clear concept of *why* you're doing it? Why does it matter?

Do you care about the attention to detail even on the things that “nobody will notice”?

It takes otherworldly commitment, discipline, and consistency to maximize those things. But that's the shokunin's goal - daily, moment-by-moment improvement on the road to whole-life mastery in spiritual and social service to others.

If the answers to these questions is “no”... I sincerely suggest that you take some time to pray it through and look for answers. A career change might be in order!

One last thing: if you read Psalm 148, you're met with a stunning scene: everything that exists in the created order is singing praises to God for His goodness.

How does a mountain praise God? By being the mountain He created it to be.

How does a tree praise God? By being the tree that God created it to be.

How does a human being praise God?

By saying it with his words?

No... *by being the human God created them to be.*