

Genesis 2:1-25

Work Meaningfully, Rest Trustfully

All of us long for purpose and peace

Purpose – we want to know that the things we work towards actually matter to someone

Peace – we want to find lasting rest not only for our bodies but also for our weary souls.

And if you're anything like me

Both of these things are hard to find

And hard to hold onto

And sometimes when you find one,

You run the risk of losing the other

Some of us find ourselves always working, never unplugging, always on the edge of burnout

Others of us are always chilling, always relaxing

And yet never feeling truly rested

Is it even possible to find and hold onto both lasting purpose and peace?

Well I believe it is

I want to show you the destination of our bible talk

And then we're going to work our way through the bible to get there

Here's the destination

Because of Jesus we can work meaningfully with purpose and rest trustfully with peace.

But let's begin from the beginning

The first thing you notice from the first few verses of Genesis 2 is that God sets a rhythm of work and rest himself

Look at verse 2

²On the seventh^a day God had completed his work that he had done, and he rested^b on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.

As we are going to see, this rhythm of work and rest is something we are to imitate.

So let's unpack the first part of this rhythm - work

We saw in chapter 1, the wonder of God's creative work

Like a master artist, God brings every living thing into existence

He turns a blank canvas into a work of art

And we are told that God saw all that he made and it was very good

God's work is purposeful and satisfying

And we were told that

God made us – humans in his image

And as part of us reflecting God's image we are to do as He does

He gave us this responsibility to rule over or steward his creation under His authority

In fact there is this hint in Genesis 2 that God's creation is incomplete

Until there are people to work in His creation

Verse 4

⁴These are the records of the heavens and the earth, concerning their creation. At the time^a that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, ⁵no shrub of the field had yet

grown on the land,¹⁰ and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the Lord God had not made it rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground.

See that in verse 5

There was no man to work the ground

What does God do in Verse 15

¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it.

In other words, God made the garden of Eden a DIY project

In case you were wondering what pastors do in their spare time

Over summer, I ordered a do-it-yourself Terrarium kit

And if you don't know what a terrarium is, it's basically a garden in a jar

They sent me all the different elements of the terrarium in a kit

And I had to do the work of putting the terrarium together

It was a DIY project

And to be completely honest this is the most gardening I am capable of

The gravel, the charcoal, the moss, the soil, the pebbles then the plants

And fittonia, as I've learnt is a great terrarium plant

I even put a light in the lid, so I can see my plants at night

And I can't tell you how proud I am that because of my work

These plants are still alive.

Who am I kidding?

And you see the thing is, God makes the world Like a DIY terrarium kit

He doesn't build the garden and say to Adam

Kick back and relax

No God says, "here's the garden"

"Roll up your sleeves and enjoy the work that I've made you to do"

Work is a good thing created by God

Work is a necessary thing created by God

The term work or "avad" in Hebrew means to cultivate, to serve, even to worship

God made us in his image to work

And if work is good enough for God

It's good enough for us.

Right from the outset God builds meaningful purpose into his creation.

And God established order in His creation – work and reward

God gave Adam every tree that was good for food

But in order for Adam to enjoy that bounty, he had to work those trees

Work is so important throughout the bible

That there are these strong warnings against laziness

Here is Proverbs 6

⁶ Go to the ant, you slacker! Observe its ways and become wise.

⁷ Without leader, administrator, or ruler, ⁸ it prepares its provisions in summer; it gathers its food during harvest. ⁹ How long will you stay in bed, you slacker?

What a rebuke for those of us tempted to be lazy

If it's not enough motivation that God works

Then look at the ants if you're a bit resistant to work

And again here is a warning about laziness from the New Testament

2 Thessalonians 3

“If anyone isn’t willing to work, he should not eat.”¹¹ For we hear that there are some among you who are idle. They are not busy but busybodies.¹² Now we command and exhort such people by the Lord Jesus Christ to work quietly and provide for themselves

The apostle Paul puts it bluntly

“Don’t work, don’t eat.”

Don’t presume on the charity of others

Idling away your time on trivial pursuits like gossip

or trolling or doomscrolling on social media

When instead you could be working to provide for yourself and others

Work is not only a good thing

When you work you get a sense of God-given reward and achievement

But God made work a necessary thing

If you work, you eat

You provide for your family and for others who are unable to work

And so if you are *able* to work you should work

Your highest calling in life is not to be a consumer

No God made you to be a producer and a provider

Now I will caution this by saying that in 1 Timothy 5

Paul speaks about widows in need

He says that the church ought to care for those in genuine need

Who are not able to work

But the widows who could work were meant to work

So Paul is acknowledging that there will be people who are genuinely in need of help

But the general principle is those who can work, should work

And work is not meant to be done alone

Here’s another thing that seems incomplete about the garden

Genesis 2 Verse 18

¹⁸ Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him.”

Here is the first thing in the garden that is *not good* – to be alone

Working by himself is not enough for Adam.

And so God makes a helper for Adam.

Someone who will be his companion in life

Which includes someone who will help him with his work

And what we see from the passage is that

Man’s best friend is not a work animal

Like a blue heeler or a kelpie or an ox

No God makes Adam a helper who is equal to him – the woman Eve.

Now as I mentioned earlier,

Andrew is going to unpack these verses about Adam and Eve next week in marriage

But what I want you to see here is that work will not be enough by itself

Work is not a substitute for relationship

But is enhanced by relationship

Now this is really challenging for me
Because I like to work on my own
I find it hard to rely on others
To collaborate and work within the timeframe of others.
I like to work on my own terms
I always thought that I would love to work remotely all the time
And then I experienced covid.
I shared a few weeks ago that as an introvert
I find it overwhelming every Sunday
When I come into contact with hundreds of people
You know what I came to realise is worse for me than hundreds of people
When there were 5 people here during lockdown.
It was so depressing to come into an empty building
Don't get me wrong there was a sense of achievement
Every week working on those livestreams
With lots of people making pre-recorded segments from home
And then the five of us here working hard to put it all together and
Stream the services to people's homes
But do I want to go back to that?
Never again, Lord-willing.
That is no substitute for working alongside others
And so let me say that many of us enjoy the balance that Work from Home gives
But I want to say to those who are like me, who prefer to be on our own
Not for medical reasons, but just because we prefer it
You also need person to person contact
And not just on a screen.
God made us for relationship with one another
In work and in all of life

Although work is part of God's good creation
Work is deeply affected by sin.
In chapter 3 of Genesis
Adam and Eve reject God's command
not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil
And in so doing humanity receive the consequences of sin
One of these is that work is now cursed with pain and toil

Chapter 3 verse 17

"The ground is cursed because of you. You will eat from it by means of painful labour all the days of your life.

¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.¹⁹ You will eat bread by the sweat of your brow until you return to the ground, since you were taken from it. For you are dust, and you will return to dust."

And so there is no such thing as a perfect job
Even the best job in the world has elements of drudgery, boredom even danger
We have occupational health and safety in the workplace
Because you can get burnout, injury at work or even die
You shouldn't be surprised when you see politics at work
And selfish ambition trumping teamwork

And when that new manager shelves the project that you and your team
Have worked hard on for 12 months
Don't be surprised.
Work is affected by sin.

So this side of heaven,
Work is both a good and necessary creation by God
But still deeply affected by our sin
And so we should recognise that
Don't look for the perfect job, the perfect workplace
You might need to persevere and not just keep quitting to look for the next job
But also don't stay in a job because you keep hoping things will change for the better
In our country we also have things like ombudsmen, unions, workcover
Where we can raise concerns or seek compensation because of a sin broken workplace
And so we should use them when we see things like exploitation and negligence
Not every Christian in every culture throughout history has had these benefits
So we should be thankful to God for these things
But neither should we have unrealistic expectations that work can never deliver

But what about those who are unemployed or underemployed but seeking to work?
What about those whose bodies don't allow them to work even when they want to?
What about those who feel trapped by meaningless and repetitive work
Because they have to provide?
What about those who do unpaid work that is not acknowledged by others?
I find these verses in Colossians 3 incredibly liberating for all of us

²² Slaves, obey your human masters in everything. Don't work only while being watched, as people-pleasers, but work wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done for the Lord and not for people, ²⁴ knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord. You serve the Lord Christ.

First century slaves in the Roman empire could do jobs as varied as running an estate
Or doing the most menial of household chores
The common thing amongst all slaves was they did not have their own freedom
They were the property of their owners
They did not have their own agency and some of them could be doing the worst jobs
For terrible masters
And yet according to Paul
Christian slaves had the freedom and honour to serve a different master
A better master – The Lord Jesus
A master who knew their situation
A master who knew their hearts
A master who recognised their work even when no one else did
A master who saved them from sin and would one day reward them in eternity
With those wonderful words, "well done good and faithful servant"
Jesus is a game changer when it comes to work

Because of Jesus you can work meaningfully with purpose

You can clean toilets for Jesus even when no one else cares
You can hang out a load of washing for Jesus even when that is all you can manage
When all your body allows you to do is pray

Jesus hears and knows
And when you do work that gets no pay or recognition but criticism and insult
When you do it for Jesus it is a beautiful act of worship
And one day Jesus will share his inheritance with you
You don't need to compare your work to anyone else's
But labour faithfully in whatever you do,
With whatever resources God gives you
Do it from the heart
Do it meaningfully for Jesus.

**The second part of the rhythm God created is rest
Because of Jesus we can rest trustfully with peace**

Let's unpack again with Genesis 2 verse 3

³ God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, for on it he rested from all his work of creation.

Now the first thing to raise is why does the all-powerful God actually *need* to rest?

Isaiah 40 says

The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the whole earth. He never becomes faint or weary.

Rather than *needing* rest He is the one who grants rest and recovery to us.

So why does God rest?

Well the word rest in Hebrew is the word "Shabat"

From which we get the word Sabbath

And it literally means stopped working

God finished his work, he completed it, so he stops

And we were told that God admired his handiwork in Genesis 1

But in so doing he established a pattern for us to follow

We work and then we stop working

And for Israel, God built that rhythm into the law in the ten commandments

This is Deuteronomy 5 verse 12

¹² Be careful to remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy as the Lord your God has commanded you. ¹³ You are to labour six days and do all your work, ¹⁴ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.

So there's the pattern established by God from creation

People are to set that Sabbath day apart from the other days of labour

That's what holy means – set apart

And it's to be a rhythm of remembrance

Rest is God centred

We remember our dependence on God

We are creatures who rely on our Creator to sustain us

So remembrance is an act of trust

Just like the Israelites in the Exodus

were told not to collect more manna than their daily needs

So we are not to work 7 days a week

But to trust God's provision over 6 days and rest on the 7th

And then Moses adds a new dimension to the Sabbath in verse 15

¹⁵ Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out of there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. That is why the Lord your God has commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

This day of rest is also a regular remembrance of God's salvation
God rescued you
You did not rescue yourself from slavery
So build regular rest to remember the mighty redeeming God

It's interesting when you think about the origin of words in the English language
The words recreation and holidays are used by everyone
But these words have Christian origins grounded in the concept of rest
Recreation is not just fun activities or free time to watch Netflix
It is the act of being *re-created*, restored, refreshed, by God when we rest
So that we can also fulfil our God given purpose in work
Holidays are not just long weekends or trips to Queensland or Bali
These are *holy days*, where we stop work and set aside time for worshipful remembrance
Remembrance of who God is and what He has done for us
I think it's time to reclaim the real meaning of these words

You see the great challenge to a healthy rhythm of work and rest
Is this idea that we can run 24/7
You know those convenience stores called 7-11
Back in 1946 when the economy was booming after the war
And people's consumer lifestyles were increasing
They changed the store titles to reflect their new opening hours
7am to 11pm which was considered revolutionary at the time
What are the opening hours of 7-11 now?
24/7
But now you can go to Kmart 24/7 and buy a t-shirt or an ironing board
Then go and have a burger at a 24/7 McDonalds
And then you can work off the calories at a 24/7 gym
We live in an age where there is no rhythm of work and rest
Everyday looks like every other day

And technology means that we are constantly plugged in 24/7
Our laptops and tablets means we can work from anywhere
Our phones mean we can check our messages all the time
And we can rest from anywhere, anytime
A beach, a café, a bedroom, an office
And this technology was meant to free us
Make our lives easier and more convenient
And they have become our 24/7 slave masters
But to maintain a 24/7 lifestyle
You need a stimulant don't you
Caffeine is the most widely consumed psychoactive substance in the world
Just choose how you want to consume it
Guilty as charged
I drink so much coffee, it has little effect on me until I withdraw from it
But the thing about caffeine is it masks fatigue, it doesn't get rid of it
Because here's the thing about 24/7

We are creatures not the Creator.
We do grow weary
The only one who can operate 24/7 is God
God made us to get tired, so that He could restore us with rest
He made us dependent so that we would depend on Him
God made us to reflect and remember and trust Him
Not just to hustle

God gave us rest for our good
Not just for our bodies but also for our souls
But how does this relate to Jesus?

Well the Pharisees took the Sabbath law
And they made it a legalistic weapon to judge others with
Including Jesus' own disciples

Then Jesus responded to them this way
²⁷ Then he told them, "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So then, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

First thing to note - Sabbath rest was a gift that God made for people
It was not meant to be a legalistic slave master that crushes us
Second thing to note – Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath
Jesus came not to abolish the law but to fulfil it
The Sabbath law was fulfilled in Jesus
So we should be careful not to weaponise the Sabbath

Paul says in Colossians 2
¹⁶ Therefore, don't let anyone judge you in regard to food and drink or in the matter of a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of what was to come; the substance is Christ.

The principle and the practice of Sabbath rest is good
I think, it is a good and godly life-giving practice to try to set aside a day a week to rest
To remember God
But that is not Sunday for everyone
In fact the Jewish Sabbath was on a Friday evening to Saturday evening
But not everyone can set aside the same day
Think of people who work in hospitals or fire stations or maintaining train lines
Think of people who don't have much option but to take the least wanted shifts
Think of people who work on staff in churches
Sunday is our longest working day
My Sabbath day is a Monday
So where you can, you should try to set aside a Sabbath
Don't make it legalistic
Don't judge the practice of others according to what you decide

But Paul also says the Sabbath is a shadow of true and lasting rest
The author of Hebrews in Hebrews chapter 4 speaks of an eternal Sabbath rest that remains

One that is more than a weekly Sabbath

A rest that is greater than that Israel experienced when they entered the promised land
One that can never be achieved by our own works of righteousness
But only by faith according to the Hebrews author
The substance of lasting eternal Sabbath rest can only come through trusting in Jesus

In fact, Jesus said in Matthew 11

²⁸ “Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Have you ever had that experience where you have a two-week holiday
And you feel physically rested
And all it takes is about an hour of phone calls or emails back at work
And all that stress comes flooding back.
And you feel the need for another holiday
No holiday or long weekend can address that weariness of the soul
Are you weary from grief?
Are you burdened by guilt and shame?
Are you tired when you see your own sin and that of others?
Are you heavy laden with all the responsibilities that you can never fulfil?
Do you feel the weight of God’s commands?
Like a heavy yoke when you can’t even keep your own word?

If that is you Jesus extends this invitation to you – come to me and I will give you rest
Rest for weary souls
Peace that surpasses understanding
A yoke that is much lighter than ours
Because Jesus took the heavy yoke.
The last words Jesus said on the cross before he died: “It is finished”
Jesus finished the redemptive work that his Father God gave him to do
The work that you and I could not do
To clear our debt of sin and shame
And so instead of a yoke of work he offers us a yoke of rest
But in order to accept that yoke, you must rest *trustfully* in Jesus

I hit burnout in May 2021

I was running so hard in the first year of covid that I hit a wall the next year
Our family were having a short holiday in Warrnambool
And while we were down there I said to Emma
While you go op shopping with the kids
I’m just going to visit a couple who lived in town
I had done the funeral service of their son 6 months earlier in Melbourne
And I just wanted to check in on them
So I did a pastoral visit over lunch
Then on another evening I said to Emma
I’m going to pop out for dinner
and attend a METRO graduation at Warrnambool Presbyterian
Both of these things were wonderful things to do
And that night Emma rightly asked me
“Why are you working while you’re meant to be on holidays”
And I didn’t know why?
I couldn’t answer her
I was constantly on duty 24/7

There was no rhythm of work and rest
I did no exercise
I had no hobbies
I didn't know how to stop working
And my head was a mess
When I came back from our holiday I went on stress leave
The key to rest is trust in Jesus
And I have struggled in ministry to trust in Jesus because of my pride
If I did not meet with people
Then what would happen to them?
If I let people down, then what would they think of me?
Can you imagine the pride behind that attitude?
The yoke I created for myself was far heavier than the yoke of Jesus
And I have had to learn in the last 5 years
I am not God
I will fail and I need to let others fail
I am finite and frail
There is only one rescuer – and that is Jesus not me
I need help
I need to rely on others
I need to pray always and do sometimes and not the other way round
I need to confess my pride to Jesus and find forgiveness in him
I need to rest trustfully in Jesus
He has done on the cross, what I could not do
And His Spirit is working in the lives of others even when I am not
I am a work in progress
And am still learning to rest trustfully in Jesus
And I have appreciated your help and your prayers for me over all these years.

So let me sum up
God created a rhythm of work and rest for us
Work is good and necessary
So work hard and don't be lazy
Find meaning when you work for Jesus
Rest is an act of remembrance
Only God can run 24/7
So depend on your Creator
Rest one day out of seven when you can
But find true and lasting rest in **Jesus** by trusting Him.