

DISCIPLESHIP

WITHIN VOCATIONS

understanding work through the lens of
Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration

by Katherine Sikma

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BIG IDEA

What is God's intention for work? Genesis 1-2 says that work is part of the created order. It's a way we reflect the image of God, and we have been invited to continue God's good work of creation through our work. Work didn't come in after the Fall as a punishment for sin; work was always part of what it means to be human. In this lesson, we'll talk about how scripture shapes the way we approach our work.

LESSON OVERVIEW

Bible Conversation: Read and talk about the passages. (10 minutes)

Article: Read "On Academic Faithfulness" together. (10 minutes)

Discussion: Process concepts together. (15 minutes)

Exercise: Apply the concepts using a specific exercise. (15 minutes)

Wrap Up: Share final thoughts and pray. (5 minutes)

BIBLE CONVERSATION



READ: Genesis 1: 26-28

26 Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

27 So God created humankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

28 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."



ASK: What does it mean to be created in the image of God?

POSSIBLE RESPONSE: Humans reflect something of God's essence. As humans, we uniquely bear the image of God and are called by God to make much of the good world God created. We work because God works.



READ: Genesis 2:15

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and care for it.

This was the first job of humanity. The words "work" and "care" in Hebrew are *avad* (till, tend, cultivate, work, or serve) and *shamar* (keep or care).

Tim Keller writes: "When we work we are continuing God's work of forming, filling, and subduing. Whenever we bring order out of chaos, whenever we draw out creative potential, whenever we elaborate and 'unfold' creation beyond where it was when we found it, we are following God's pattern of creative cultural development."

God cares deeply about the kind of work we do and the way we do it.

ARTICLE

ON ACADEMIC FAITHFULNESS

BY KATHERINE SIKMA

In his book *Garden City*, John Mark Comer asks us to consider our work:

“Does it contribute to human flourishing? Is it good for the earth? Good for you? Good for your city, your nation, your world? Does it take the raw materials of Planet Earth—metal and wood and wind and words and ideas and $E=mc^2$ —and arrange them into a place where image bearers can thrive in relationship to God? Most importantly, is it something that God smiles on? After all, his opinion of your work matters more than everybody else’s. After a hard day’s labor, can you hear God whisper in your ear, ‘Well done!’? What about your work/job/career/business/college major/five-year-plan/dream? Does it help humanity? Will it make the world a better place? A more kingdom-like place? A more Eden-like place?”

Most people are not accustomed to thinking about work like this.

In the beginning, God created human beings in God’s own image and gave them responsibility and authority to tend to the creation God had made. Humans were invited to join in the work of caring for the world, and discovering all the potential packed in it.

This means that our work is a holy calling. It’s not just something we do to make money; it’s a way of partnering with God and one another to continue developing the goodness of the creation. Whether you’re a biologist, janitor, athlete, human resource specialist, teacher, or politician, God is inviting you to use your capacity as an image-bearer to work for the good of the creation, for God’s glory. We are called to apply the fullness of our creative capabilities to tending, developing, and restoring the stuff of the earth.

Right now, your work is that of a student. You are spending your days studying the creation in preparation for a lifetime of tending to the specific area you have chosen. That work is a holy calling. And so, God cares just as much about whether or not you go to class as He cares whether or not you go to church. Does that sound crazy to you?

He wants you to love this creation as much as He does; He wants you to figure out how it was supposed to work and then to fix it. There is nothing in the world that God doesn’t care about. So whatever it is that you’re studying, God thinks it is fascinating. And God gave you a mind that has the capacity to examine it and figure it out and make it work like it was supposed to.

What difference does it make that God cares about biology and business and customer service? How should these things work in the Kingdom? Think deeply about this—you have the chance, right now, to learn about the world and to be trained to cultivate and create things that tell the story of who God is, whether that’s a lab report, a short film, a business plan, an Excel spreadsheet, or a piece of choreography. Do a good job. Even in those core classes you don’t like or don’t care about, there is truth there, God’s truth, and there is something to be learned, if you’ll only apply yourself to it. You might be surprised to find what you learn. Even if it’s not your favorite class—even if you hate it—you are called, right this moment, to be a student. So you should be the best student you are able to be.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said this: “If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, ‘Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.’”

I am asking you to do your work like that, because I believe God Almighty is inviting you to join Him in the work of redeeming all the broken things in this world. You have to study and learn everything you can. Write your papers and make your films and do your labs to the best of your ability, because God doesn’t just want to save your soul and bring you to heaven; God wants to bring heaven to earth today, and He is asking you to be all in.

In *The Message*, Romans 12 says this: “So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.”

Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Because we believe that work is a gift, we give ourselves fully to it to honor God.

Your vocation is to be a student. Right now, that’s the place you’re responding to God’s call. What are you learning in class? What is it teaching you about who God is, who you are, and how the world should be? What might it look like to bring order into chaos, draw out creative potential and unfold creation?

Be *great* students, in every class. It's a witness to your professors, your fellow students, the university staff, and your future employers. You are studying the creation of the Most High God. Don't flake out!

We need excellent teachers and screenwriters and researchers and photo-journalists and entertainment managers who are making the Kingdom of God show up on earth right now. Your faithfulness to your work is your gift to God. Do it in such a way that God will look upon it and say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

DISCUSSION

Follow up on any thoughts or questions from the article. Use these questions to deepen insight and understanding.



ASK: *What are the main points of the article?*

POSSIBLE RESPONSE: Our work is a way we image God. Our work is to unpack the goodness of the creation. In the things we make, we tell the story of God's goodness and redemption.



ASK: *What ideas from the article are new to you?*

EXERCISE

Let's personalize these concepts a bit. Think about your discipline in light of the Biblical framework. (If you're still undecided, choose one of the classes you're taking right now.)

CREATION

Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands." The psalmist is saying that the creation itself is telling us about who God is.



ASK: *What do you think were God's creational intentions for your major? What would it have been like before the Fall? What can you learn about God and God's character through your field?*

EXAMPLE: Audiology—the study of hearing. Sound, language, and communication are creational goods. God has intricately designed our sense of hearing. God wants to communicate and be understood. God wants His creatures to be able to communicate and be understood.

FALL

The entire creation is frustrated; things don't work as they're supposed to.



ASK: *In your major, where do you see the brokenness? Where can you see the effects of the fall? How has your discipline been warped by sin?*

EXAMPLE: Audiology—some people can't hear. Their ears or brains malfunction and they are unable to communicate like they were meant to. Sometimes, deaf people become cut off from community and their ability to flourish is diminished. Access to care and services are diminished because of a broken healthcare system.

REDEMPTION

John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son..." The word "world" here is the Greek word *kosmos*, which means universe or creation. This means Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was not only for the salvation of humans, but also for the salvation of the creation itself.

Therefore, we believe that God cares about all things. Abraham Kuyper said, “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of creation over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, ‘Mine!’” As Christians, we believe there is nothing outside the scope of God’s care for the creation.

Romans 8:19-21 says, “For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.”

This means that the creation is waiting for the children of God—you and me—to act. We’re invited to join Christ in his restoration of all things, by continuing the work we were given to *avod* and *shamar* the creation.



ASK: *How can you join Christ in liberating your field from its “bondage to decay?” How is your work helping to heal what’s broken in your field? In your work, how can you be an agent of redemption? What Biblical principles can you apply?*

EXAMPLE: Audiology—we understand the ear and how hearing works so that we can treat and heal what was broken. We help people hear so they can connect with others. We join Christ’s healing work (Mark 7:31-37).

RESTORATION

Revelation 22:3 says, “No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.” This tells us that when Christ returns, everything will be as it should be.



ASK: *Imagine how your field will be different in the new heaven and the new earth. What will it look like? How should things be done in the Kingdom? How can you start living into that reality now?*

EXAMPLE: Audiology—In the new heavens and the new earth, there will be no more suffering, and no more problems with hearing. Our work now points to that future. Maybe in the new heavens and the new earth, audiologists will be able to discover new things about hearing and sound that we can’t understand now.

WRAP UP

This week, try praying this prayer before you begin your classes and your homework. Thank God for the opportunity to study the creation, and dedicate your work to Him.

○ heavenly Father, who has filled the world with beauty: Open our eyes to behold your gracious hand in all your works; that, rejoicing in your whole creation, we may learn to serve you with gladness; for the sake of him through whom all things were made, your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

You made the universe with all its marvelous order, its atoms, worlds, and galaxies, and the infinite complexity of living creatures: Grant that, as we probe the mysteries of your creation, we may come to know you more truly, and more surely fulfill our role in your eternal purpose.

So draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you; and then use us, we pray, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people, through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

—adapted from *The Book of Common Prayer*

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Discipleship Essentials by Greg Ogden

Every Good Endeavor by Timothy Keller

Creation Regained by Al Wolters

Desiring the Kingdom by James K.A. Smith

Garden City by John Mark Comer