

# taking action!

small group material



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Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Labourers

## MORE THAN A JOB • Occupation

### What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Genesis 1-3

Most college graduates give great significance to work and career. Many will even try to define themselves by what they do for a living. Work is important to who we are as God's creatures, but work can only take its proper meaning and place in life from the purposes for which God created it.

The ancient Greeks thought work had no intrinsic value, but was simply necessary for leisure. It was only in leisure that people (nearly always free, wealthy males) could pursue a life of reflection, virtue and civic involvement. Today, many people also work only for money to pursue other personal interests. Others live for their work without any sense of its integration with a larger view of life. Besides these errors, Christians may view work as insignificant to the life of following Christ or view it only as a "platform" for ministry. They may fail to see that work itself has value to God, and that it can bring glory to God in itself. Genesis 1 and 2 show us just how important work is to being human.

In the modern period, far too much attention has been given to questions of natural science and history in looking at Genesis 1 and 2. There are clearly some claims that relate to science. God created the universe from nothing (ex nihilo), for example, and He created humankind. But nowhere in Scripture is there any attention given to how He accomplished His amazing feats.

Genesis 1-3 is unique, not only in world literature, but even in Scripture. We can only sample its multi-layered richness here. The opening chapter of the eternal story is squarely focused on God. "In the beginning, God..." Before the world was, God is. The Old Testament authors return constantly to creation as a decisive argument for His superiority. All other deities are nothing compared to Yahweh. He alone made "the heavens, the earth, the seas, and all that is in them." The gospel starts here, as the New Testament evangelists make clear when addressing pagan audiences. And because God made us, we owe Him everything.

The entire Pentateuch, or first five books of the Old Testament, is framed in the idiom of a treaty between a ruling suzerain, or high king, and his vassals. The contrasts with the ancient despots are remarkable (as in Genesis 15, where God stunningly commits Himself to His subordinate), but it's still that kind of relationship. God establishes the structure of the world and gives humankind a share in His sovereignty over creation. Notice how the arrangement of the six days emphasizes this idea:

In the first three days, God establishes three realms or kingdoms: light and dark, water and sky, land and plants. But there cannot be realms without rulers. So on Day four: God creates astral bodies to "rule over," or govern, the realm of light and darkness. On Day five: God creates birds to occupy the realm of the sky and

### What's the Big Idea?

Work is part of God's original plan for humanity. Through our work as students and graduates, we can reflect God's image and bring glory to Him as part of our faithful stewardship over His creation.



water life to fill the kingdom of the oceans. Day six: God creates animals to occupy the land and to eat the plants that occupy the land. And to complete the creation: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’”

#### Realms

Light and dark  
Water and sky  
Land and plants

#### Rulers

Sun, moon, astral light “to rule over” light and dark  
Fish and birds  
Animals; then humans “to rule over” all creation in His image

Called the “Framework Hypothesis,” this interpretation of the creation week leaves aside chronology and science in order to emphasize a cosmic hierarchy and particularly, the stewardship of humanity over God’s created order. This suzerain-vassal relationship is the basic metaphor Jesus uses repeatedly in the parables. In retelling the story of creation from another perspective, Genesis 2 says that God specifically put man in the garden to tend and keep it (v. 15). God also portrays Himself here as the ultimate worker and humans as made in His image. Our work is one aspect of being made in God’s image.

Note also that Genesis 1:28 is the first command to humanity, the first time God’s even speaks to humankind! So what He has to say here is important, foundational. He says, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

This is the original mandate for the development of human culture. Biblical scholars call it the “Creation Mandate.” Part of what it tells us is that work is not an afterthought, nor is it a nasty side effect of the fall.

But sin does damage our work. (Gen. 3) Sin has been terribly destructive to all of human culture. We cannot respond properly to God’s command to rule over the earth without understanding how difficult, discouraging and misdirected work is because of our rebellion against God.

The redemption of humanity will culminate in the new heavens and new earth. While we do not know much about the life to come, several parables and prophetic passages indicate that human work and culture will continue in some form after Christ returns.

Most campus staff and student leaders have spent little time in secular employment. So they can’t speak from strength of experience about the joys, frustrations and possibilities of the careers that most students begin at graduation. Staff and students know the pressures and battles of their own situation, but may underestimate the coercion the world has on Christians in the secular workplace and the difficulty of doing classical ministry activities in the context of a job. Staff, especially, may have a tendency to underrate the value of work in the marketplace, especially because they are so excited about the work God has called them to do. They may not appreciate what an “insider” can accomplish that staff cannot.

But what spiritual mentors can do, like nobody else, is equip graduating seniors spiritually for their calling and commission them for the task. The calling of a spiritual mentor is to help others fulfill their calling. What a privilege! Consciously take this attitude in leading this study.

Psalm 8 makes a great closing prayer for this study.

## What’s Our Response?

Help students understand the centrality of work and culture in God’s plan. This is the context of discipleship. Encourage them to commit themselves to knowing and doing God’s will in the work He is calling them to accomplish now and after graduation.

## What Are the Questions?

Genesis 1-3

### LAUNCH

What do you expect from your career after college? What do you think your work will mean to you?

### EXPLORE

Read **Genesis 1:1-2:3; 2:15.**

1. Who is the central figure in the creation story?
2. What are some things this passage tells us about our place in the world? What does it say about human culture?
3. What does “he blessed them” mean?
4. God portrays Himself here as a worker. Name some of the work and crafts He ascribes to Himself in the rest of Scripture. (For example, shepherd, potter...)
5. What evidence do you see here that being made in God’s image may have something to do with work?
6. What is God’s first command to humankind? Does this have special significance?
7. How did work come into the world? What are the implications of this for how we should view work?
8. What is the significance of the fact that work was created before Adam and Eve sinned?

9. What do these Scriptures teach about the scope of human work (and culture)?
10. What does this passage say about our stewardship over the earth? What does this imply for environmental issues?
11. What does this passage say to those who see work as merely the means to other pursuits, or merely as a platform for ministry?

Read **Genesis 3:17-19.**

12. How is work changed by sin?
13. What can we learn from this passage, and the rest of Scripture, about how rest and leisure relates to work?
14. How would you summarize God’s perspective on work? What is the meaning of work?

### APPLY

15. What attitude should we have about the problems that sin has caused for work? Can we do anything? What expectations should we have for the redemption of work?
16. How does this view of work differ from other views you see in our culture today?
17. What obstacles do you face in making this perspective on work a part of your life?

## What Are the Answers?

1. God is the main actor and focus of this account, mentioned by name more than 30 times in the first chapter alone. He stands over His creation with no rivals or equals.
2. God created us and put us here. We are ruling on His behalf. Human culture has the potential to glorify God.
3. Among other things, “he blessed them” means that He bestowed favor on them. He gives them His loving regard as He sends them out to fulfill the purpose for which He created them.
4. Creator, gardener, advocate, composer, performer, builder, architect, captain, king, teacher, judge, servant, priest, physician, carpenter, garment makers...
5. God was a worker and we are created in His image. The Creation Mandate is given immediately after humans are described as being created in His image. Biblical scholars see “the image of God” first of all in our original moral purity, our eventual Christlikeness and our reflectiveness of God’s glory.
6. In addition to blessing them, He commissions them to develop human culture. So this is a defining purpose for humanity.
7. God created work. It can be a blessed activity, a part of our calling and an action of co-creation.
8. Work has value in itself. It is not the result of sin and therefore not something to view negatively.
9. Work is all that we do to “rule over” the earth. It’s more than what we get paid to do; it is all that we do as His regents.
10. In general, Christians should be in the forefront of the environmental debate. The creation story explains why the stewardship of the earth matters. Specifically, the command to “rule over” creation does not give people a license to exploit or misuse the world’s resources. The world belongs to the Lord, not to us. We are regents and stewards. So even though we may use it for our needs, we dare not misuse what God has made and called “good.”
11. Work is partly the means to meet needs in other areas of our lives, but it has meaning and value to God in itself. It should not be viewed only as a platform for witnessing.
12. Work in this fallen world is often frustrating, fruitless and misguided.
13. Rest is good. God is our example for rest. Rest and leisure should be structured into our lives. But leisure alone is not God’s will.
14. Work is good. It is part of our purpose on earth. In spite of sin’s destructive effect, work can be a means of serving God and bringing Him glory.
15. We cannot overcome all the problems but we should work against the effects of sin here, just as we do in other aspects of life. But only when Christ returns will work be fully transformed.
- 16.-17. Allow the group to discuss.

## Memorize

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Genesis 1:28