

# Sermon Transcript

## April 12, 2015



## In The Beginning, God Worked

### Genesis 1-3 and Romans 8:11-22

*This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on April 12, 2015, at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio copy of the sermon on CD is available by request at (860) 563-8286. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at [www.wethefc.com](http://www.wethefc.com).*

## **Sermon Text**

### **Genesis 1:26-2:3**

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

<sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” <sup>29</sup> And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. <sup>30</sup> And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. <sup>31</sup> And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

<sup>1</sup> Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. <sup>2</sup> And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. <sup>3</sup> So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

### **Genesis 2:15**

<sup>15</sup> The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

### **Genesis 3:17-24**

<sup>17</sup> And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; <sup>18</sup> thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. <sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

<sup>20</sup> The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. <sup>21</sup> And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them. <sup>22</sup> Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—” <sup>23</sup> therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work

the ground from which he was taken.<sup>24</sup> He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

### **Romans 8:11-22**

<sup>11</sup> If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

<sup>12</sup> So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. <sup>13</sup> For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

<sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

### **Introduction**

I would like to begin this morning by telling you the story of a man by the name of Sealy Yates.<sup>1</sup> Obviously, the details of his story are unique to him, just like the details of your story are unique to you. But, as is true with many issues of life, his story speaks to a common struggle many people of faith have as they seek to find meaning and purpose in what they do Monday to Friday. It is the common struggle of discovering how Sunday fits into Monday to Friday. It is the common struggle in understanding how God fits into your job or your current station of life, no matter what it might be at this moment. Many here this morning will be able to relate to his story. Hopefully, through this series on “Work and Faith,” his discovery will become your discovery.

At age twenty-five, Sealy Yates had already gone to law school, passed the bar exam and landed a great job. He was married to a wonderful woman and they were raising

their first child. Clearly, life was good! And yet, in the midst of achieving his goals and reaching his dreams, he found himself becoming depressed. As he began his career, he found himself haunted with questions perhaps you have wrestled with in your vocation. “Is this all there is?” “Is this what I want to do for the rest of my life?” “What is the meaning of it all?” “At the end of the day, is what I am doing for the vast majority of the week, amounting to anything important?” Have you ever asked these questions as you wrestle with the monotony of getting up and going to work just to do it all over again, day after day after day after day . . . and so on? And, for what?

As he wrestled with these questions, he discovered that his faith was part of the reason he was struggling. He had come to genuine faith in Christ at the age of 15. Like many here this morning, it was his passion to serve God with his life. But the concept of what it meant to serve God with your life was defined by “church-work.” If he became a pastor or a missionary or did some kind of full-time Christian work, then all of his life would be dedicated to serving God. But, he didn’t have a church job. He was a lawyer. And so in order to serve God, he felt the need and the pressure to take on a heavy schedule of church activities. And because he had a heart to serve God, he was facing an internal crisis because he couldn’t see how his job was a vehicle to serving God.

Reflecting on this very common struggle, Nancy Pearcey writes, “Christians who are seriously committed to their faith, often experience this inner tug-of-war. Like Sealy, most of us absorb the idea that serving God means primarily doing church work. If we end up in other fields of work, then we think serving the Lord means piling up religious activities on top of our existing responsibilities. But where does that leave the job itself? Is our work only a material necessity that puts food on the table but has no spiritual significance? Is it merely a way of making a living?”<sup>2</sup>

But Sealy’s whole perspective changed when he discovered how to look at his job from a Christian worldview. When this happened, he discovered how being a lawyer is actually a way you can serve God. You can serve God as a lawyer by confronting wrong, establishing justice, defending the weak, and promoting the public good. It was not just about making money and winning cases. Sealy said, “It is fundamentally a way to execute God’s own purposes in the world—to advance justice and contribute to the good of society. . . It is not about running a business or making a living. In our work, we do the work of God.” To which Yates added, “That’s when I rediscovered joy.”<sup>3</sup>

That is the discovery I hope you make through this series on “Work and Faith.” This conversation we are about to have is not just about how to live out your faith in the workplace. We will talk about that. Nor is this conversation just about how to be a testimony in the workplace in the midst of some of the real challenges you face at work.

And we will talk about that as well. But as we get started, I hope the real revelation you gain from this series is the discovery that your job, the actual task of what you do, is a way to serve God. By the way, this is true of you whether you have a job in the marketplace, or you are a stay-at-home mom or a stay-at-home dad, or you are a student or even retired. What “you do” on Monday to Friday is an act of serving God. This is what brings a sense of purpose and meaning to your daily life. In your work, you are actually doing “the work of God!”

There is a prominent Christian business man by the name of John Beckett. He wrote a book about how to view work as a Christian. You may not like the title of the book. It is called, *Loving Monday*. He ran a successful manufacturing company in Ohio that engineers and builds components for heating units. He said of work, “we usually think of a calling in religious terms—such as a calling to the ministry. But a calling to a vocation goes beyond just the religious connotation. We can be called to the arts, to athletics, to government service or to business. If it is God’s call, it is a legitimate and high calling. In other words, you can be an ‘ordained’ plumber.”<sup>4</sup> What he means by that is the work you do as a plumber is actually a way to serve God. If you make this discovery, it may go a long way to help you embrace and actually “love Monday.”

Whatever we do, we have to figure this out because this is where we spend the vast majority of our time. This is where the vast majority of our faith is lived out on a daily basis. Dorothy Sayers said it this way, “if religion does not speak to our work lives, then it has nothing to say about what we do with the vast majority of our time—and no wonder people say religion is irrelevant. How can anyone remain interested in a religion which seems to have no concern with nine-tenths of his life?”<sup>5</sup> And I would add, if nine-tenths of your life is occupied with activity that is not seen as being of service to God in this world, then you are going to end up just surviving in your job and work will be drudgery and you will live for the weekend. You will exchange God for the idol of leisure. Or, you will go the other extreme and find your identity in your job and it will all be about your status and success and not the common good of others. And your work becomes all consuming, as you bow down to the idol of success. Either way, in each case, your view of work doesn’t satisfy the desire to do something of purpose.

We need to understand “work” from a biblical framework. If we can discover what Sealy Yates discovered, it can go a long way to helping us find satisfaction and joy in our work. If we can discover how our work is actually contributing to the work of God, it can go a long way to help us find satisfaction and joy in our work. If you can actually see how your work is a “partnership” with what God is doing this world, it all of sudden elevates what you do and gives it new meaning. To have this conversation, we need to start at the beginning and take a look at God.

## In The Beginning: God Worked

When you open your Bible to the very beginning, Genesis 1:1, it begins with God. “*In the beginning, God. . .*” As God is being introduced to us for the very first time on the pages of Scripture, we meet and encounter a “working God.” “*In the beginning, God created.*” In the beginning, God was at work. In fact, when you get to the end of what is called “the seven days of creation,” it is summarized like this in Genesis 2:2. “*And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.*” So not only does the Bible introduce us to a God at work, but it also introduces us to the concept of a work week. Six days God worked and on the seventh day God rested.

Tim Keller makes note that many ancient cultures had stories of their own to explain the beginning of the world and human history. For example, the ancient Babylonians believed that the world came to be because of a cosmic conflict between the gods. The god Marduk overcomes the goddess Tiamat and forges the world from her remains. And so in their view of the world, it reflects an uneasy balance of powers at play in the visible world. But in the Bible, we find that the world did not come to be as a result of a conflict among “the gods.” God has no rival. In fact, all that is unseen and seen is dependent upon God. So Keller writes, “Creation then, is not the aftermath of a battle but the plan of a craftsman. God made the world, not as a warrior digs a trench but as an artist makes a masterpiece.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, at the root of the story of the beginning of time, we find a God who is at work. In fact, the word for *work* used in Genesis 2:2 is the same word to describe the tasks we often call *work*. Thus, work is not a four-letter word. Rather, it is good because it is rooted in God. In the beginning, God worked.

In order for us to discover how our work is doing the work of God, we need to first consider the kind of work God does. The most obvious thing we see is God creating. He made all that there is, seen and unseen. He made it all work together. And furthermore, he took delight in what he had done. Taking it all in, he declared, “*it is very good.*” But God also is a provider and a sustainer. In Genesis 1:29, God says to Adam and Eve, “*I have given you every plant yielding seed . . . And every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.*” This is reinforced in Psalm 145:15-16, “*The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.*” God does the work of a provider. But there is also something else God does. He renews what is broken. After Adam and Eve rebel against God, toil and death enter the world. Things are broken. People are broken in this world. And God is in the business of renewing and healing broken lives. We see this in Romans 8, where creation is described as being in “*bondage*” and “*groaning.*” But we are not without hope. Through the resurrection of Jesus, God is

doing the work of making all things new. He restores and heals and renews all that is broken. So this is the work that God does in this world. He creates. He provides. He renews. This is what you would find on God's resume.

Tim Keller adds that the Greeks had an account of the beginning of creation that includes the idea of successive "ages of mankind." The original age was called "the golden age." That was an age when the gods and men lived together in harmony, not unlike the Garden of Eden. Except there was one difference. In the Greek version of this "golden age," no one worked.<sup>7</sup> The land simply provided for them. In contrast, in the biblical account we find God at work for the sheer joy of it.

And so that is where we start in this conversation of "Work and Faith." Work is sacred because work is anchored in the character of God.

### **Created in God's Image: Created for Work**

As the story of creation comes to a conclusion, we discover that the culminating act of God in creation is the creation of man. The uniqueness of man in God's creation is that we are created in the image of God. "*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.*" So what does it mean to be created in the image of God? It is fascinating to see how the concept of being created in the image of God is linked in the text to the call to work. A major part of what it means to be created in the image of God is that we were created to work and to live in the constant cycle of work and rest. If you don't see this connection between being created in the image of God and the call to work, you are missing God's original purpose in creating us. We were created to partner with God through our work. Through our work we do the work of God in this world.

Right after we read in Genesis 1:27 that God created man in his own image, we see the implication of what that means. In the very next verse we discover what it looks like to be God's image bearers in this world. "*And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.'*" Nancy Pearcey says this is "the first job description" ever posted. She goes on to say, "*to be fruitful and multiply*" means to develop the social world, build families, churches, schools, cities, governments, laws. The second phrase, '*subdue the earth*' means to harness the natural world: plant crops, build bridges, design computers, compose music. This is what some call the Cultural Mandate because it tells us that our original purpose was to create cultures, build civilizations—nothing less."<sup>8</sup> This purpose for our existence is even further stated quite clearly in Genesis 2:15, "*The LORD God took the man, and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it.*" In other words, God put Adam to work. That is how we reflect the image of God who creates, provides and renews.

Have you ever seen the Disney movie *WALL-E*? It is the story of a robot who has the job of cleaning up the earth after it had been completely trashed. Humans were no longer living on the earth, because it had become virtually uninhabitable. They had been evacuated to a space station, with the hopes of returning to earth once the robot got everything cleaned up. At the beginning of the movie, *WALL-E* is basically by himself and working very hard, like robots are programmed to do. But then he meets another robot by the name of Eve. It doesn't take long for *WALL-E* to become rather fond of his new found friend.

His fondness for Eve causes him to get in a spaceship and make his way to the space station where humans were buying time until earth was again habitable. At the space station they were living a rather carefree existence as robots were doing all of the work and humans were pampered and waited on hand and foot. Here is how Tom Nelson describes humans in this scene. "With the passage of time, adult humans now resemble giant babies with soft faces, rounded torsos, and stubby, weak limbs—the tragic deforming and atrophying result of human beings doing nothing but cruising around on cushy, padded, reclining chairs, their eyes fixed on video screens, taking in large amounts of calories, and sipping from straws sticking out of giant cups."<sup>9</sup> I am sure there are quite a few cultural messages being communicated through this movie. But Nelson says that no theme explored in this movie is more compelling than what it means to be human. The idea of "a do nothing couch potato existence is actually repulsive and dehumanizing." Why is that? It is because when we were created we were created with work in mind.

Work is part of what it means to be human. Keller says, "work is as much a basic human need as food, beauty, rest, friendship, prayer and sexuality; it is not simply medicine but food for our soul. Without meaningful work we sense significant inner loss and emptiness."<sup>10</sup> The fact that it was a prominent part of the created order prior to the fall, tells us that it is designed to be a blessing and not a curse. The curse with the fall was not that God consigned us to work. Rather, the curse is that it is not easy and there is much in this fallen world that makes work difficult. The tasks of raising a family and making a living are now filled with the pain of living in a fallen world. The point is that after the fall, God does not rescind the Cultural Mandate to "*multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.*" He just acknowledged the challenge that awaits us in a world under the curse of sin.

But here is where I think we get messed up in our thinking that causes us to miss seeing the sacred function of our work. As Christians, we tend to get the implications of creation and the fall when it comes to work. But where we get messed up is with the notion of redemption. And that may sound odd to you, being that we are evangelicals

who speak often of redemption. But here is what we often miss in our conversation about redemption. We have bought into the notion that redemption is a spiritual issue and outside of transforming the way we respond to God and treat others, it really doesn't have anything to do with the function of my job or my Monday to Friday. We are just holding on until we are out of here or until Jesus comes back. We sing with some disdain for this world, "This world is not my home, I am just a passing through." But that is not true. "This is our Father's world." He created it. He called us to subdue it. The Cultural Mandate still stands. It has not been revoked by Jesus. In fact . . . God is redeeming this world and reconciling all things to himself! Therefore, your work is a sacred function and it has everything to do with serving God.

Nancy Pearcey is the one who really opened my eyes to how we have bought into the lie of the sacred and secular split of life. We tend to divide our lives between the sacred and the secular. We have our sacred life where we address spiritual matters and then we have our secular life, often consumed with work. And when most Christians think of what it means for the sacred to integrate with the secular they simply think about being a good testimony or being a hard and honest worker. No doubt, that is part of it but not all of it. In fact, our culture has bought into this split between the sacred and the secular and it contributes to faith being irrelevant to the modern man. The sacred is no longer viewed as a valid means of determining how we know what we know. Faith has been relegated to a lower tier of determining truth and informing life and it is seen as just a subjective opinion of how life works and it is to be sequestered behind the doors of religious institutions and is not meant to intersect with the public square. And we contribute to the separation of the sacred and the secular by not seeing how all of life is sacred. When we relegate our Monday to Friday tasks to mere acts of drudgery that have nothing to do with serving God, we are guilty of removing what is very sacred from the essence of everyday life.

Pearcey reminds us that through Jesus, all of creation is being redeemed. Heaven is not a place for disembodied saints playing harps and floating around in the clouds. Did we not celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from the dead last week? When Jesus appeared to his disciples after the resurrection did he not invite them to "touch" him? Eternity will include a renewed physical heaven and earth. And guess what we will be doing? We will be doing what we were created to do! And what is that? We will be partnering with God in fulfilling the Cultural Mandate by creating things that are beautiful and beneficial out of the raw materials of God's new creation.<sup>11</sup> So what does that mean for me now? What does that have to do with me now, living as a Christian in this fallen world? Pearcey says, "In our work we not only participate in God's providential activity today, we also foreshadow the tasks we will take up in cultivating a new earth at the end of time."<sup>12</sup> Through our work, we are doing the work of God in this world.

John Beckett, like Sealy Yates, said that when he made this discovery it was liberating for him and life giving. When he overcame the sacred/secular split he was able to regard his work “as having great worth to God.” He said, “As a business person, I was no longer a second-class citizen . . . Nor did I have to leave my Christian convictions and biblical values outside the office entrance when I headed into work on Monday morning.”<sup>13</sup>

We were created to work. This is part of what it means to be human and what it means to be created in the image of God. So the job you do—whether in the workplace, at home, as a student or even one who is retired—no matter how mundane it may be, is a way to partner with what God is doing in this world. What is he doing? He is creating and providing and renewing. And you see tomorrow as a way to partner with what God is doing in this world.

### **Our Work: God’s Work**

This is just the first part of a nine week conversation. I understand we can talk rather romantically about the notion of work and that many of you have hard things to deal with at your place of vocation or your station of life. Next week we will talk about how God uses these hard things to change us. But here is the one bite I want you to take this morning and chew on all week long. Can you begin to identify how what you do at work or what you do at home or what you do at school is a way of partnering with what God is doing in this world? I am not talking about being a witness or testimony, as important as that is. But I am talking about the actual task you are doing. How is that task partnering with what God is doing in this world? It may help bring a greater sense of purpose and a measure of joy to your labor.

There is a story that goes like this. Three stone masons were having a conversation while they were building what is now the magnificent St. Paul’s Cathedral in England. A visitor asked them, “What are you doing?” The first mason responded, “I am cutting stone.” A second mason added, “I am making a living.” The third mason said, “Me, I am building a cathedral for God and his people.”<sup>14</sup>

What about you? What are you doing tomorrow? How would you answer the question? Would you simply answer it with the task you perform? Do you simply see it as a way to earn a paycheck? Or, do you see how what you do is partnering with what God is doing in this world? I get tired with the mundane aspects of my job. I finish preaching this morning and then I have to go write another sermon. Sometimes, I define my job by “what I do.” And when I do that it becomes drudgery. Sometimes I have to pause on a Thursday morning and remind myself that I get to partner with God in speaking words

of life into you. That is when I recover my joy in what I do. You need to pause and do the same thing.

So here is your assignment for this week. If you are in a community group, I hope you spend some time discussing this question. If God's work in this world is defined by three categories: creating, providing and renewing; which of these three categories best reflects what you do in your job? As you make this identification, can you begin to recognize how your work of creating or providing or renewing is partnering with the work God is doing in this world. And though Monday may not always be easy, may you gain a measure of joy in knowing that you are partnering with God. What you do tomorrow is just as sacred as what you are doing right now.

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<sup>1</sup>Nancy Percy *Total Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004) 63

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 64

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 66

<sup>4</sup>John D. Beckett *Loving Mondays: Succeeding In Business Without Selling Your Soul* (Downers Grove:, IVP 2006)

<sup>5</sup>Dorothy Sayers *Creed or Chaos* (Manchester, NH.: Sophia, 1949) 77

<sup>6</sup>Tim Keller *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* (New York: Dutton, 2012) 34

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 34

<sup>8</sup>Percy, 47

<sup>9</sup>Tom Nelson *Work Matters* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2011) 19-20

<sup>10</sup>Keller, 36

<sup>11</sup>Percy, 86

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 86

<sup>13</sup>Beckett., 72

<sup>14</sup>Nelson, 27

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 **Getting To Know Me Questions**

1. What was the first job you ever had?
2. What excites you or brings you joy about what you do at work/home/school?
3. What things drive you crazy about life at work/home/school?

 **Diving Into The Word**

4. Consider how God “works.” He creates, and provides and renews. How do you see each of these three aspects of God “at work” in Genesis 1:1-2:3?
5. Read Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:15. Discuss the connection between being created in the image of God and the call to work. How does this help you see the sacred nature of your work?
6. Read Genesis 3:17-19. Discuss the impact the fall of man has on “work.” How do you see the impact of the fall where you work? How does living in a fallen and broken world make it difficult to see the sacred nature of your work today?
7. Read Romans 8:20-23. What is the hope all of creation has in Jesus? What does that tell us about how God feels about the “physical world” and the place where we work?
8. How is your work a participation with God in his work?

Do you create? How?

Do you provide? How?

Do you renew? How?

 **Taking It Home**

9. . What do you want to do this week to acknowledge how your “work” is God’s work?  
Next week come prepared to share what impact that had on how you approached your job.