

My name is Beau. I'm one of the pastors on staff here. This morning what I want to do more than anything is open kind of a can of worms that we'll hopefully be able to talk about over and over and over again over the next 30-40 years. I really want to begin to discuss and maybe even discover through our study of Scripture is a theology of work. I know the word work doesn't really excite you very much, so we'll just call it *vocation* from here on out. I want to talk about vocation, a theology of work, because we have a lot of college students that come here and they're going to have to work one day. And so I would like to equip them to have a right lens in which to choose what job you take, what major you choose, where you go and where the Lord leads you through that. And then for the rest of us who aren't in college, hopefully the majority of us have a full-time vocation, whether that's taking care of the little babies at home or working at the office as a banker or cooking or being a garbage man or fire fighter. Whatever it is, I want you to have a theology for that, so when you go to your vocation, when you wake up on the morning, work is not just something you do because you have to. It's not just something you do because you need to pay the bills. Although that does happen hopefully through most of your occupations. But really there's something a lot deeper going on through this that we need to understand. If we ever want to be the people that God desires us to be, we have to understand these things. We have to understand vocation, we have to understand work, we have to understand why we do it and why God it that way. So that's what I want to do.

I just want to open the can this morning by giving you a couple of quotes. Here is the first quote. I got this out of a book called *The Fabric of This Word* by Lee Hardy. He says, "In their best-selling analysis of American society, *Habits of the Heart*, Robert N. Bellah and his associates claim that at the heart of any recovery of our common life, of our 'social ecology,' there must be 'a change in the meaning of work.'" That's a pretty big statement for Bellah to write this book about American society and to say at the heart of it, we have to change the way that we think about work. "The meaning of work must change, they insist, because it has been too long informed by the spirit of modern individualism, a spirit which promotes the idea of work as a means of private advancement rather than public contributions ÷ a spirit which will rend the social fabric of our society and erode our democratic institutions if allowed to have full sway in American life." Dorothy Sayers, a very well known European writer, one of C.S. Lewis' favorite writers, said this along those same lines and in that same vein of thinking. She says, "The habit of thinking of work as something one does to get money and position is so ingrained in us that we can scarcely what would imagine what would happen if we begin to think about work otherwise. People become doctors these days, not primarily to relieve suffering, but to bring their family up in the world. People become lawyers, not necessarily because they have a passion for justice, but to bring their family up in the world." And she notes something interesting. She says, "During World War II, one of the great surprises we had in our lives is that we found ourselves for the very first time happy. Why? Because in the first time in our lives, we found ourselves doing something, not for the pay and not for the social standing, but for sake of working together to get something done that benefited everyone." This issue is huge, and most of us do not have a theology for work, even though we're going to spend more of our waking hours at work than we will anywhere else. So it's pretty important that you have an idea and a worldview and a sense of what you're doing there, how God can be glorified there. And if you know anything about Americans, Americans are arguably the hardest working society in the world. In 2004, Americans worked an average of 350 hours more than the average European. But I think it's interesting and Hardy says, "The vast majority of Americans loathe their daily occupations, or at least they find them exceedingly tedious." So some of you are in here and you like your job. That's great. But specifically to the younger generation, that's the exception not the norm. I meet with a lot of college students and they think the norm is for them to be able to find a job that they just love and that makes their heart go thump. That's not necessarily the norm. In fact, if you go and ask one of the older men and

women in this church, most of them will tell you that's not the case. Most people don't like their jobs. "And moreover, if the boredom and banality of the weekday routine were not compensated," Hardy says, "by a little excitement on the weekend, most employees would find their work completely unbearable. They work because they have to. It's a financial necessity." That theology of work, which most of us live under, most of us make decisions under, is not going to cut it if we really want to experience the best possible life.

So here's what I want to do. I want to just run you through something and kind of explore the Scriptural theology just briefly about work and then talk about what this means for our lives and how this plays out. Again, we're going to talk about this over and over and over again. So let's go to Jeremiah 29. Just to give you some historical context of what's going on when Jeremiah is writing this letter. He's writing to a group of Israeli exiles. King Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had come in and ransacked Jerusalem and had taken thousands of Israeli people to Babylon. So now a group of God's chosen people are in exile in Babylon. And within those exiled people were prophets, and the prophets were telling the people, "Hey, it's no big deal. I know that God's done this. He just wanted to make a point, but we're going to be out of here soon." And they were prophesying falsely that God was going to come and redeem them out of Babylon very, very quickly, so there was no need to get settled, there was really no need to do anything at all except for wait for God to come back and get them. So this had developed a disposition in the Israeli people while they were in Babylon that they were just going to be there and use the city until God came back and got them. If you know something or you think you know how something's going to turn out, you don't tend to be too engaged. A few weeks ago during the Super Bowl, I was up here like most of you during the 5:00 service because I'm godly and I love the Lord more than I love football. So I recorded the game and watched it when I got home. It wasn't a great or exciting game, but it was a good game. It was a close game, so I didn't know who was going to win. About the third quarter, my phone vibrates. I'm signed up on the New York Times to get updates about things when they happen. The presidential primaries were going on so I didn't think anything of it and I just nonchalantly opened it up and looked at it and it said, "Giants upset Patriots in Super Bowl in last :35." I just sat there, and I'm having this moment with myself. My wife and my mother-in-law are both watching the game with me. They don't know what just happened, the game is still going on. It was just so miserable. I was so angry. I wanted to share my anger with them, but I didn't want to ruin it for them too. Now that I had this information, do you think I was more engaged or less? I actually left the house and came up here to the office and made some copies for a meeting I had the next morning. I came back to the house for the last five minutes of the game because I was so frustrated and didn't know what to do. That's kind of where the people of Israel are. They've got this mindset that they know what's going to happen, so they're not doing anything. They're not engaged. And Jeremiah is writing a letter to them that's going to say, "On the contrary, these guys who are acting like they're speaking in God's name are really false prophets and don't know what they're talking about. In fact, you're going to be there for 70 years before God comes to rescue you. And if you're old enough to read this, you're probably going to be there until you die." So this is what the Lord says through the prophet Jeremiah. The situation in Babylon is very similar to the one we're in now. The New Testament calls us aliens and sojourners and exiles on this strange land. So what He has to say to them about remaining God's people within a city like Babylon has very much to do with what He might have to say to us.

Let's just read it together, starting in verse 4. "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the LORD. For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and

not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile." We've talked about this passage before. There's lots of things that we can draw out of this. But this morning I want to concentrate on one verse, and that's verse 5 that says this, "Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce." Now when you first read this, it might seem like a common sense statement. Yeah, you have to build houses and plant gardens. You have to work while you're there. If you're going to be there for awhile, you had better get to work, you had better dig in.

But if you read this in the lens of the theology of work that God instituted in the very beginning in the book of Genesis, it really says a lot. So turn back to Genesis 2 with me. Starting in verse 5, "When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground—then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed." Skip down to verse 15. "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it." So here you have God, who says, "Let Us make man in Our own image," and the way that He does that is God Himself reaches His hands down into the dirt, breathes life into man, created a garden for him, sets the man in the garden and says, "Work it and keep it," before the fall. So this seems to mean that before the fall, one of the primary ways that God instituted for man to image Him, to glorify Him, which was the reason we were created, was by working the ground and by keeping it, by being a gardener. So what does a gardener do? He takes the raw materials of earth, and out of them he creates something, he cultivates something that can be used for good, for the flourishing of the entire human society. That's what a gardener does. He cultures, he cultivates, he works. So if you're listening, a little more depth just got added to your work and your vocation than simply making ends meet. If one of the primary ways that we image and glorify God is by mirroring Him and taking the raw materials of creation and cultivating it, then there's a lot that's supposed to be going on when you and I are working. There's a pretty deep thing occurring in our universe when that's happening. And if you think this is just a one time deal, you can read Genesis 9. Man does fall, he doesn't do a good job gardening, he touches the tree that God told him not to, he disobeys God, tries to be God and gets kicked out of the garden. God eventually gets mad at the whole human race, sends judgment through a flood, takes Noah and his family, puts them in an ark, they stay in the ark until the waters recede and when Noah gets out of the ark, God tells him the same thing. "Plant a garden. Begin to work. Be fruitful and multiply." And then He takes them from captivity in Egypt and takes them to the Promised Land, a garden, a land flowing with milk and honey. And then they get kicked out of that. So when you read Jeremiah 29 after they've gotten kicked out of the Promised Land, He's saying, "While you're in exile, I want you to do the same thing I mandated you to do in the beginning. Part of what I want you to do is image Me through gardening, through working."

This has gotten lost in the church as a whole, but really I think the Protestant Reformers knew this better than anybody. Calvin, Luther, Zwingli, some of these guys understood this. In fact, they said it a lot more poetically and brilliantly than I could ever hope to. They said, "Through the work we are called to do God himself carries on his creative activity in this world. But precisely for this reason work does not make us into gods, although it does relate to what is god-like about us." Gardening, working, creating, taking the raw materials of earth and fashioning them for the good of human society, this is the image of God in us that's supposed to come out and glorify Him through us. This doesn't make us gods, but this makes us glorify Him and image Him like we were created to do. "Work makes us into God's representatives on earth, his stewards, entrusted with the task of developing the rich resources of the earth for the benefit of the human community." Mark Noll, a great historian says it this way, "Who formed the world of nature (which provides the raw material for physical sciences)? Who formed the universe of human interactions (which is the raw material of politics,

economics, sociology, and history)? Who is the source of all harmony, form, and narrative pattern (which is the raw material for art)? Who is the source of the human mind (which is the raw material for philosophy and psychology)? And who, moment by moment, maintains the connection between our minds and the world beyond our minds?" God did, and God does. Gardening, taking the raw materials of earth and fashioning them for God's glory and the benefit of those around us. Think about it. What is music? What is a musician? A musician is a gardener. A musician is one who has taken the raw material of sound and crafted it for the flourishing of human community. What is theater? Theater is taking the raw material of human experience and fashioning them into story. What are visual arts? Taking the raw material of dye and putting them on canvas. We could go on and on and go through every job. And there's something really deep going on here that, if you and I grasp it, will cause the gospel to be pushed down further into our hearts, and it will cause us to glorify God and love our city better because we understand what we're doing while we're at work, which is the place where we will spend the most amount of time. This is really heady, weighty stuff.

So the question is, "That's awesome and that sounds really sexy, but how do I do that? I'm a nanny. What does that look like?" or "I'm a secretary...I'm a garbage man. How do I do that?" So that's where we're going this morning. And again, I think it's so crucial that if you don't begin to see your work through the lens of Scripture, you will just continue to work and continue to do what you're doing and you'll never experience the depth of life that God has for you. But I think that in pursuing this, pursuing a vocation there are at least three reasons why this is hard in American society. Not just hard, but there are three things that I think are just slamming up against you and me daily that are trying to keep us from glorifying God in this way. The first one is relativity. Now when you think of relativity, you tend to think of moral relativity, the idea of "Who's to say what's right and what's wrong? Who's to say what's ethical and unethical?" But besides being hypocritical, relativity is just tragic. Because if you live with a standard of relativity, if you live with a worldview that is relative and everybody gets to define what they think is good and what they think is bad, how are you ever going to get a standardized, authoritative definition of what is work and what's not work? More so, how are you ever going to get a standard, authoritative definition for what's good work and what's not good work? Let's think of "American Idol." Who is to say that those people on there are bad singers...besides everyone who has ears? If the standard is relative, when Nancy gets up there and just makes a mockery of Whitney Houston and Simon lovingly, graciously and pastorally tells her that she's no good at all, that this is not her vocation, she should not pursue it, who is to say that he's right and she's wrong when she disagrees with his assessment? This is something we see play out every day. There is no standard. There can't be. And so whatever this person thinks is right. And if you're trying to develop a theology of work and what's good work and what work glorifies God, in a culture of relativity, this becomes very, very hard to do. Very interesting to say the least.

I just got done reading a fascinating book about the internet. And for those of you who spend numerous hours a day on the internet, I would recommend this book. It's got some crazy stuff in there, but there are some things that I think are right on. The author writes about how the internet is fueling relativity. He describes how anybody can be a producer on the internet. And so as a result, creativity and originality is getting suffocated because anybody can get on there and say, "I'm a good writer...I'm a good musician...I'm a good videographer...I'm creative...My work's just as good as yours..." And whereas it used to be that you had to go through some standards, nowadays with the beauty of technology, there are no standards and the line's getting blurry. So relativity is just becoming the very air we breathe, which is sad because we're on the internet a lot. He tries to encapsulate it by saying that we're mixing up self expression with art. Self expression is not the same thing as art. He writes, "What self expression does not mean is 'the making of art,' any kind of art, popular or high. It used to be that performers strove to create excellence and originality within a popular style. They competed against each other's work. Now, if you're a self-expresser looking to find fame and fortune on the Web, you strive only to be popular. The majority of YouTubers never took the time to master a craft." That might be the understatement of the decade. They "never took the time to master a craft. They rush online and try to sell. For attention itself has become a new type of income. And for all the amusement I experience watching all these films, I feel bored and empty afterwards.

Now not everyone can become a doctor, but everyone knows how to express himself these days. We all have a PhD as it were in our own lives, and so our opinions or judgments, feelings and perceptions are our own field of expertise. When journalists or scholars authoritatively express themselves on any aspect of life, they are foolishly presuming an exclusive claim on a subject that we have mastered just fine for our selves, thank you." Who is to tell me that my photography is not good? Who is to tell me that my work is not good? If you don't have any standards, it becomes a zoo. And just to bring it home a little bit more, I know we have a lot of educators and people studying to be educators here. An article in the latest Time Magazine is "How to Keep and Make Better Teachers." They estimate a need of about 1.8 million new teachers because of the Baby Boomers who are going to retire over the next fifteen years. They say that they're having this really hard time keeping teachers because they know they need to pay the good ones better, but they don't have any standard by which to define which ones are good and which ones aren't even though they know that there are good teachers and teachers that aren't as good. Here is a direct quote from Time Magazine, "The idea gaining the most momentum - and controversy - is merit pay, which attempts to measure the quality of teachers' work and pay teachers accordingly. . .Of course, everyone knows that not all teachers are equal. Just witness how parents lobby to get their kids into the best classrooms. And yet there is no universally accepted way to measure competence, much less the ineffable magnetism of a truly brilliant educator. In its absence, policymakers have focused on that current measure of all things educational: student test scores," which we all know doesn't measure much at all. But do you see the dilemma we run into as a culture? We can't define who's a good teacher and who's not. We can't define who's a good worker and who's not. Not by culture's standard we can't.

So what do we do? We have to have new lenses through which to measure. We have to have a new standard. The standard for us as Christians for whether work is good or not is Scripture. The authority on that is Scripture. So what does Scripture say about our work? Well Scripture say work that is good is work that images God, work that is done for the glory of God. And the way that God is glorified through our work is at least two-fold. Firstly, it's when you do work as well as you possibly can, when you do your job as skillfully and as well and as diligently as you possibly can. Now this is a scary proposition because most of us don't work as hard as we could, because somebody's not over our shoulder. Now some of you have micromanagers for bosses, but most of us don't work as hard as we should. The problem with that is Scripture. Paul says in Colossians 3:22, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord and not for man." Do you know to whom he was writing in that text? A slave. The way we glorify God through our work is by working as hard as we can, even if our vocation is slavery. That's weighty. Because I don't know that if I were a slave, I would be wanting to work as hard as I could for my master, especially if I were receiving harsh treatment. But Paul's going, "No, whatever you do." So whether you're picking up garbage, cutting hair, answering telephone calls, watching babies at the house, going to school, whatever you do, good work is work that is done for the glory of God through diligence and skill. Not only that, but good work is work that is done for the good of other people. Work that is good is work that is helpful. In other words, if you're working and doing your job for your own benefit, if the end of your job is just for you to make money and pay your own bills, Scripture's going to say that's not loving work. You weren't given the skills and creativity you have to terminate and end on yourself. You were given them for the good of the community. In 1 Corinthians 10 Paul says, "Whether you eat or drink" and I would add whatever you do "do it for the glory of God." And married to the idea of the glory of God within 1 Corinthians 8-10 is the idea of doing it for the good of your brothers and your sisters. This is a radical definition of good work. This is a radical definition of vocation. A vocation that is done to image the Creator as skillfully, as diligently and as faithfully to those around you as you possibly can. That's our standard. That's why we work. And if it's not why you work, I don't think God's going to damn you to hell, but I do think you're missing out. If you're working just for yourself or if you're not working as hard as you can, you're losing out and the people around you are not being loved as well as they could be by you. I know that the church has taught you that the way to be Christian at work is to share the gospel with everybody at every cubicle. But what if you just started working diligently and became the most skillful person at your vocation? Do you think you'd have a little bit more influence? What if you started doing your work and thinking through while you were working what it would mean to transform your

job, no matter how tedious it is, into the good of those around you? Returning a phone call can be transformed into good for someone else. When you return a phone call well and quickly, you see how people respond. That's loving, that's good work. It's not good work to let an e-mail sit for weeks. And I'm talking to myself here. We have to get out of this mode of relativity. Your work is good when it glorifies God in these ways.

Here's the second thorn that we get into when we talk about work. We have, in the church, developed a mindset or theology where we make a false dichotomy where we actually believe that some jobs are more spiritual than other jobs, as if jobs in and of themselves have souls and can be spiritual. And I'll get angry talking about this, because I was a youth pastor for five years. What we liked to do as youth pastors is find any kid that has any kind of gift and tell him that he needs to be a youth pastor. "You had better be in the ministry...You had better learn how to play an acoustic guitar... You had better feel called to be in the ministry...You had better do this..." Because we actually believe, even though it's not in Scripture, that this high calling is more important than this high calling. It's just ridiculous, and it's not Christian, it's Greek. If you know the philosophers, they believed the immaterial was good and the material and physical was bad. So Plato and Aristotle and others really believed that the highest good that man could achieve would be to completely unhook yourself from the physical world as much as you could. This is why they had slaves. So they wouldn't have to do the bad, dirty work, the unspiritual work that wasn't as good as this. And if you could get to the upper echelon of people where you could just sit around and think, you were spiritual. You had excelled to the highest good that you possibly could. And these people who were slaves, because they were working with their hands were lesser than you were. And you may be thinking that doesn't make any sense, but we do it all the time. To think that this didn't creep into the Christian world is wrong. If you think about it, where did the gospel first explode? In what kind of a society? A Greco-Roman society that believed these things. Hardy says, "The gospel was initially proclaimed to a culture dominated by the world and life view of the Greeks. And many in the church, having been brought up in Greek philosophy, began to interpret the gospel by the basic framework of Greek thought. They often gave the impression, for instance, that the good news of the kingdom of heaven amounts to little more than the promise of an eternally disembodied life spent in the undisturbed contemplation of the highest possible object thing." Like we're finally going to be released when we die because we're going to be away from all the physical and material. Well actually, the resurrection is going to be material. This is why God putting His hand in the dirt was unfathomable to the Greco-Roman mind. Because God didn't do that. God was spiritual and this was physical. For Him to lower Himself, that was a radical thought, but you find God getting His fingernails dirty in the very beginning of the Christian Scriptures. This is why when Jesus came, He didn't come as a philosopher, He didn't come as a Roman general. He came as a carpenter, one who uses his hands. He came as a gardener. This is really deep stuff.

So here is the ramification for that. Listen to what Dorothy Sayer says. "It is not right for [the church] to acquiesce in the notion that a man's life is divided into the time he spends on his work and the time he spends in serving God." If you've compartmentalized your life so much that God is first, work is second, family is third or however you have it, that's a wrong view of the Christian life. Work is not compartmentalized from your relationship with God. You can't compartmentalized spirituality from your work. They are connected. The way you do your work is connected to you being a Christian. Your relationship with Christ in fact is the central point of how you do your work. You don't have to rearrange your priorities, you just have to figure out what it looks like to glorify God in these stations of life that God puts you in. And she goes on to say this, "He must be able to serve God in his work, and the work itself must be accepted and respected as the medium of divine creation. 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" And I would add here "...and to tithe." That's what we do with the investment banker guy. Hey man, just do your job, make lots of money and then just give it to us. That's why God has you being a banker, so you can make lots of money and give it to us." That's a part of it, but she says, "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 just love her. Elisabeth Elliot, an author and an old

teacher used to say this. Every time she would see someone comb hair, she couldn't help but to think of Genesis 1:1. Order out of chaos. Every time you clean your house, Genesis 1:1. Order out of chaos. You're joining with God in being gardeners. And what this means is that the most minuscule of activities, if done with the right disposition is glorifying to God. So it doesn't matter whether you're picking up trash or answering e-mails or picking up dirty diapers or whatever. It's important. No other religion has this view of work. No other religion takes the most minute details of what we do and says that every single bit of it is important.

Here's the last thing that I think we're going to battle up against. Human beings, because of the fall, especially Americans who work so hard, have a tendency to turn our little gardens into gods. Let me read you another idea from the internet book guy. It's brilliant because he calls people like you and me who like to do blogs prosumers, consumer and producer mixed together. We've turned our leisure time into work. So when we have time off, we're producing blogs so that we can put them on the internet so people can consume them by reading or watching them. Now I'm not telling you blogs are bad. You just go home and wrestle with this. I shared this with my wife who has a blog, and it did not go well. But he says that we've so mixed our leisure time that even our leisure time is not full of producing. We never rest. We don't know how to rest. The internet has ushered in this new age where we never rest. He says that in the pre-internet age, whether you were watching a sit-com or listening to Miles Davis, there came a moment where you turned off the TV or stereo, put down the book or magazine, came home from the theater or opera or the movies, you stopped doing culture, you stopped cultivating, you stopped gardening and you withdrew or advanced into your private social space or into your solitude. You used the phone, you went for a walk, you went to the corner bar for a drink, you made love to you wife or husband, you wrote a letter. Now more often than not, you go home, you go to your computer and online. And there you log on to a social networking site, make an entry on your blog, buy something, try to meet a romantic partner, maybe have sex or at least a real wicked, distorted kind of sex. You might send an e-mail, but no one ever just sends an e-mail these days. Every online activity leads to another online activity. Then you will almost definitely be on a site that you paid to join or that is sponsored by a large corporate entity which keeps the site interesting in all sorts of artificial, manipulative ways. With the internet, culture never ends. Work never ends. Producing never ends.

And if what we're producing, if cultivating and gardening becomes an end to itself, it's tragic. Lest you don't think that learning how to rest, lest you don't think that turning your gift or your work into a god is going to have devastating effects on you and on the people around you, I'd like to quote an excerpt from a recent Rolling Stone issue. Referring to Britney Spears it says, "Today, Britney is alone: Arrogant, anxiety-ridden and paranoid, she has lost faith in everyone. "She goes through people like she goes through dogs," says a close friend. "There's one instant with everyone where she freaks out and suddenly says, 'I don't trust you, and I don't know what's going on.' " She does not have a manager, agent or publicist She has no stylist, image consultant, crisis-control manager or driver. She has pushed away her family: her brother and father ("It is sad that all the men in my life do not know how to accept a real woman's love," she explained); her sister Jamie Lynn, whom she speaks to on the phone and sees rarely; and, most important, her preening, difficult mother, Lynne, whom Britney considers poisonous." And here's why Rolling Stone says this happened, "Britney's first two albums sold more than 39 million records. . .Some in her camp argued that Britney was too young to be pushed so hard, and wanted her to return to Kentwood to reconnect with girlfriends. "There were meetings where people would fight about giving Britney a break, but in the end the machine always won," says a friend. "Britney wanted it too, but she wasn't aware of the price tag." Tragedy is an understatement for what's happening in this young woman's life. At some point her desire to take the raw material of her voice and fashion it for the good of people around her got twisted in such a way that her life unraveled before us. And we laugh and giggle and says, "Oh, Britney's crazy." Well it's not real hard to get there. Again, this is a conversation I want us to have over and over and over again here about gardening well, being cultivators, people that are on vocation, on mission every single day in a way that glorifies God and in a way that causes us to worship Him and not the job and work that we're doing.

So what does this look like? Because I know you're wanting me to just give you the application, which the church has the church has done so well to do. What's the application of all this? What's the application now that we have the biblical definition of work, now that we know some of the dangers? What does this look like? I'd just like to ask a few questions. For those of you right now who are working full-time, what does it look like for you to be distinctively Christian in and through your work? What does it look like for you to be a banker who is a Christian? What does it look like for you to be an educator who is a Christian and thus lives under the standard of doing good work? What does it mean to be a secretary? What does it mean to a house mom? What does it mean to be an insurance agent? What does it mean to be distinctively Christian in your vocation? That is a great question for you to wrestle with over lunch today. And here's a question for those of you who don't have a specific full-time employment, for you maybe full-time college students. But first let me say this. If you're taking 6 hours and don't have a job because mommy and daddy are giving you money, go read 1 & 2 Thessalonians. Paul's got some very pastoral words in there for you. There is something that we're missing out on if we're not doing anything. You need to tell mom and dad to cut you off and you need to get in the game. This is part of what you were created to do. But for those of you who are taking a big load and are thinking about these things, for those going, "What does it look like? I want to choose a job. I've got to choose a job. There's all this pressure. What am I going to do? What's my major?," what does it look like for you to begin to pursue opportunities in the workforce that are based on God's standard of work? What does it look like to choose your job based on how much good it can do for the city of Denton rather than how much money you can make? Because a lot of people just go, "Well, I want to do something that I really like and that makes a lot of money." Okay, that job doesn't exist. But I'll tell you what does exist, a job that would do a lot of good for our city right here. It may not be glamorous, it may not be sexy, it may not make you feel more important than you should, but I guarantee you it would probably be under the definition of good in God's eyes. What does it look like to choose a major based on those standards? I pray that we would learn this together. Because at the end of the day, we find Jesus in His own garden. We find Jesus in the garden, right before He's taken away for crucifixion, pleading with the Father for help and the strength to be obedient. And do you know what the Father's will was for Jesus? The Father's will for Jesus in that garden was for Him to take the raw material of flesh and blood and have it ripped off of His back, torn off of His face and nailed to a cross so that you and I might flourish, so that you and I might have life. Jesus Christ is our example in this. His work, His life, His death, His burial, His resurrection, this is the utmost. So as we leave today, the application is for us to look at Him as He shows us the way that this was done in His life. He served the kingdom as a carpenter long before He did as a rabbi. But then at the end of His work, He exemplified to the utmost by laying His life down for our good, through the raw material that He had taken on. So as we come to come to the Lord's Supper, would you think about that with me? And let's just look at Him and behold Him and love Him for it.

Let's pray. "Father, we love Jesus for doing this. What the first Adam didn't do, Jesus in His garden did. That's beautiful. So Father, I know that there's just a lot of heady stuff, so I just throw all this out trusting You. God, I just really, really believe that unless we grasp hold of this part of our lives, the part of our life where we will spend more time than any other, if You don't infuse into our hearts and our minds and our thoughts and our wills a desire to emulate Jesus in this, we'll just miss out. So I'm just so hopeful today, and I pray that Your people would be hopeful today that every single thing that we do, the most minuscule of activities can be redeemed for Your glory and for Your namesake. Would You teach us how to do this, even now as we come to the table? Would You teach us through the elements that represent the raw materials of flesh and blood that Jesus Christ gave for our good? Would You teach us? Would You convict us? Would You lead us? Would You fill us with joy? God, I cannot even fathom what a church full of men and women who grasp this and walked out of here and did this all week long, what that would do for our city, what that would do for their families. I can't even imagine. So help us. We come to Jesus because we need help. We come to Jesus because He's our God. And as we follow Him, we trust that You'll make us more like Him in doing these things, that we might be able to say at the end of the race with Him, 'It is finished.' Be glorified. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen."