This week on the Light Radio, Gail Robbins shared a story about Gene Work of Bayonette Point, Florida. Gene was going to be fined a hefty amount by his homeowners association if he didn’t complete re-sodding his grass by a certain date. Now there are no seeds for Florida grass so you either need to buy sod or plugs which are all very expensive. While they couldn’t afford it, they knew they needed to do it – in fact Gene, sold some of his favorite things to have enough for the sod purchase. So he ordered the sod and on a hot day in July, Gene and his brother Mark started laying the sod strips down. Then Gene began to feel a sharp pain in his chest that spread down his arm. He didn’t know it at the time but he was having a massive heart attack. As Gene was being loaded into the ambulance, going in & out of consciousness, he kept telling his wife to figure out some way to spread the sod out before it died. They wouldn’t be able to survive the economic loss. His wife just kept saying to him “Jesus will help us. It’s okay. Jesus will figure this out babe.”

The brother had stayed behind to watch the kids and do what he could on the yard in between. A while later, a vehicle pulled up and 7 firefighters & EMTs jumped out, put their gloves on and started laying down the sod. They said they came back because they knew Gene health situation was very serious and they wanted to lay down the new sod so it wouldn’t die and lots of money was wasted.

There’s something about this true story that moves and inspires us. We want to be God’s answer to someone’s real need. We want to see God use our work efforts in ways that genuinely help. This family was helped, the firefighters & EMTs felt really fulfilled and many who have heard this story since want to do something selfless for another person. There is something deep within us that wants to help others with our efforts. Sin, selfishness, laziness, greed and fear can stop this impulse in us, but the desire to help others and the common good seems to keep springing back up in history. Where did this come from? Let’s look back at some of God’s original purposes of work that go beyond what we receive ourselves through that work.

PROPOSITION: Helping others flourish, helping the common good and sustaining & developing God’s creation are key purposes that God designed human work for.

I. God’s original call to humans (managers & developers of God’s creation) (Gen 1:26-28)

God’s original call to humans was to be His care-takers and developers of creation. READ Gen 1:26-28. While God called other created things to be fruitful, multiply & fill, humans alone are given a job description – a responsibility to do. We are to “subdue” the earth (v 28) as we go about filling it and we are to “rule over” the fish, birds, and all living creatures on the ground (v 26 & 28). God entrusts humans with responsibilities that require work. While some in our day claim the Bible is bad because here it encourages exploitation of the natural world, that is a complete misunderstanding of what subduing and ruling over mean.
in THIS CONTEXT. Remember these instructions were given before sin corrupted creation. When God gave these commands, the physical world wasn’t hostile so there is no sense of needing to beat it down like an enemy or take advantage of it. Instead, God created our planet with lots of potential that hasn’t been realized yet – there are still medical cures to be found, advances in transportation to be made and improving food yields to be discovered. This subduing and ruling over is actually a call for humans to be managers & developers of the building blocks and potential that God has created into our world. That is a key goal God has given all of us to use our physical and mental efforts on.

A. Sustain & develop God’s natural creation

Now let’s look at Genesis 2 where the first work is described. Some in our day try to say Genesis 2 is a completely different & contradictory account of creation. But there is no real basis for that claim except not wanting to believe God really did create the world. Genesis chapter 2 simply steps back and focuses on a subset of chapter 1 – the creation of human life which is made in the image of God. READ v 8. So God specifically created the garden and placed the first human there. Why? READ v 15. Adam was to work the Garden of Eden and take care of it. While plants grow by themselves, to get the best crops or long term results, there is a lot of work that needs to be done. This was true even before “weeds” came into the picture with the corruption of sin. So God specifically created the Garden of Eden to need work to sustain and develop it. As humans, we are called to sustain and develop God’s natural creation.

We are not told the size of the garden but from the description in verses 10 to 14, this garden is, or will become, very large. The river watering the garden is going to feed the headwaters of 4 major rivers over a multi-country area. So Adam is going to need help to sustain and develop what God has created. When it says at the end of v 20, “but for Adam no suitable helper was found” it is not saying Adam was lonely (that comes after the fall) but that he couldn’t ALONE do all God envisioned humans to do for the future. When you’re lonely you need a friend – not a helper. A helper is someone who assists you in completing a bigger task. As God’s creation multiplied & expanded, both Adam and Eve will need even more help which is going to come from being fruitful & multiplying – a key reason why we have 2 genders – male & female.

B. Add to the common good

A question we don’t usually think about is “who does Adam’s work benefit?” It definitely benefits Adam as he gets to eat from almost every tree in the garden. The animals will get some benefit out of this garden since plants are their food at this time. Eve and any future offspring will get benefit out of this garden. Notice that in God’s plan, Adam’s work is NOT just meant to benefit himself but Adam’s work is also to benefit others. God has designed an element of human work to be for the common good – the good of our family, other people, society, God’s work, & the living creatures around us. God wants an element of our work to help the common good. In fact, God does a bunch of His work through other people. When we pray for
“our daily bread”, the answer doesn’t usually come by the sudden appearance of a bag of groceries (even when that happens, it was usually a human who dropped it off). The farmers working in the fields, the truck drivers bringing the grain to the mill, the mill workers, the makers and sellers of farm machinery, the seed producers, and the grocery store workers – all of their efforts are part of us getting our daily bread. God designed work to provide for others and the common good. Many of the jobs people consider more menial today: cleaning, collecting garbage, or stocking grocery shelves are actually very important for the common good – what would our community look like if no one collected the trash? You’ve seen some houses around that answer that question and it is not pretty!

C. Help others flourish

Back to Genesis 2. READ v 20b-25. As Gen 1:27 says, “God created mankind in His own image …male & female He created them.” God specifically created men and women different, not so they would fight about who is the most important, but so they could work together and do more together than they could do alone. Now here in chapter 2 we are given a picture of the foundation of marriage. The two shall become one. They’re working for the same goal but bringing 2 different sets of abilities, outlooks, and capacities to that task. Not only do a husband and wife work together, but as we go through the pages of scripture God calls humans to work together in many different areas – society, care for one another, church, witness, protection, worship, developing new capabilities, the list is long.

What makes that work even more special is when is when we make helping each other flourish a conscious part of serving Jesus right where we are. God designed in humans the importance of building one another up – helping each other flourish, which is the opposite of the survival of the fittest mentality that took over in nature after the fall.

II. Examples and encouragements

So we have just shared three very important goals of work that have nothing to do with what we receive. From the beginning, God has tasked humans with being managers and developers of His creation – both physical and biological creation. Three aspects of God’s call to us is that we are to use our work or effort to (1) sustain & develop God’s natural creation, (2) add to the common good and (3) help others flourish. What really is encouraging, brings out creativity in us and allows us to show genuine love to others, is when we seek to do any of these in our chores, schooling, paid jobs, volunteer efforts, retirement or disability!

A. Sustain & develop God’s natural creation

I was intrigued a couple weeks ago to read a report on a study done on the Sahara Desert in Africa by professors at the Kings College in London. Today, the Sahara is one of the driest and most inhospitable places for man, bird or beast. Yet, it is not hard to find evidence of humans living in this area in the past including thousands of rock
art sites illustrating a lush environment, large game hunting and livestock herding. In other words, there was a time when the Sahara was not a desert but a really lush, green and living place. **So what happened?** What we are commonly told today is that past humans over-grazed and exploited the resources causing the break-down of the environment. But according to this study, it was actually the slow change of the Earth’s orbit that started to decrease the amount of rain in that area which led to less & less vegetation until 5500 years ago (by the article’s dating), the ecosystem hit the point of no return towards a lifeless desert. However, what these professors also found was that about 1000 years before that terminal collapse point, nomadic or semi-nomadic cattle herders arose as the vegetation got less. Humans changed how they lived. This actually caused a **500 year delay** in the collapse of the Sahara ecosystem. In other words, humans were not to blame for the problem, but their willingness to change their work habits actually helped slow down this inevitable decline towards becoming a desert. Created in God’s image, these ancient people were being **managers** of God’s physical creation – they were sustaining and even developing in a collapsing eco-system forestalling the inevitable 500 years! Wow!

Look around at all the discoveries people have made in science, health, civilization and travel. These all came from the building blocks God placed in the original creation. These advancements are **“new”** to us, but the building blocks, raw material, and potential have always been there. Life is an opportunity God gives us to discover and develop things using our creativity, analytical thinking, & compassion which come from being made in God’s image. Greed, selfishness, warfare and pride keep us from God’s original mandate, but life becomes fuller when we get back to wanting to sustain God’s creation and develop new things from God’s creation.

Do you have as one of your goals in your work **sustaining and developing God’s creation** – whether that is at school, home, a work place, church or your community? Do you seek to make the physical world a better place through your actions? Do you treat the natural resources around you with respect? Proverbs 12:10 says, “The **righteous care for the needs of their animals, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel.**” (That is Proverbs 12:10 which is not listed on the outline because I put it in later! 😊) Why would acting rightly in God’s eyes have any relation to how we treat animals? Because, God created us in His image to manage and develop His creation for God’s glory and God’s goals.

What helps us do this?

1. **Treat nature around us as God’s.** We want to leave it in better shape than before we came. Pick up after yourself! Don’t needlessly destroy things!
2. **Encourage creativity when you don’t have something.** I was fortunately to learn how to do a lot in Boy Scouts – I am an eagle scout. One of our tests to see how well we had learned was to go out by ourselves for 24 hours with just a couple matches, a pocket knife and a piece of plastic. We were to do the best we could just using the things in nature. That’s a form of developing.
3. **Remember that sin affects everything.** Even our good actions create problems that need to be dealt with. That means we must be constantly making intentional adjustments so we are sustaining and developing God’s creation. For example, do you realize we are worse today at recycling the huge amount of cardboard used in shipping things than 20 years ago, even though we have more promotion and laws about recycling? **What happened?** On-line ordering and Amazon. What helped people in one way, has caused a number of new problems. Before on-line shopping, the largest amount of cardboard was used to ship things to stores who turned into great cardboard recyclers – they taught their employees to recycle only the right kind of cardboard, but all of it and they used baling machines to flatten that cardboard so no contamination could get trapped in them. NOW, most shipping cardboard ends up at peoples’ homes who aren’t as conscientious. In fact some of you probably don’t flatten or close the tops on your recycled boxes, which means other items in your recycling can get caught in those open boxes and ruin the batch so it can’t be recycled.

4. **Know you need to put voluntary limits on all new things.** In a broken sin-filled world everything has some negative consequences. God has given us everything for our good, but that good can hurt, ruin or enslave if we don’t set limits. Do that for the higher reason of honoring God and we help the future.

B. Add to the common good

So we carry out God’s job description to all humans to manage and develop His creation by **sustaining & developing God’s natural creation.** We can also do that by adding to the common good. I get so excited when people use their jobs, contacts, abilities and time to add to the common good, not just get money or a job done.

15 years ago, Tom Morales came to that point in his life. His parents moved from Mexico in 1953 to become one of the first Hispanic families in Indianapolis, Indiana. Tom did well in life working at Proctor & Gamble and Union Carbide. As he was getting more successful, his dad regularly asked him, **“when are you going to start giving back?”** In other words, when are you going to add to the common good? So Tom Morales felt the need to do more with the second half of his life – specifically the growing Hispanic community in Indianapolis. **“I knew there was more to life than just being successful in corporate America.”** So Morales started by setting up a resource center to help Hispanic immigrants with food and housing.

The one day, one of those he helped said, **“Mr. Tom, thank you for trying to help my family with this resource center. What I would really like you to do was to give me a job. I’ll take care of the rest.”** That changed Tom Morales direction and he started a business specifically designed to provide temporary jobs for people so they could prove themselves and be hired full-time. His company in Indianapolis now has 100 full-time employees and 11,000 associates working in temporary jobs throughout the Indianapolis area – most of them are immigrants from 25 different countries. INC. magazine has named it one of the 200 best places to work. The
company partners with 15 Indianapolis charities and community centers to help immigrants & refugees get oriented to a new country. Recently, the company is starting a new initiative to train people for management jobs. This is all driven by his Christian faith and wanting to help the common good with his work.

There is something worthwhile and redeeming in life when our work adds to the common good — when our efforts help society move forward, people do better, families be closer together. It is exciting when Christians move beyond the bottom line of needing to work for money to seeing what ways their work efforts can help others. Don’t just go to school to learn – also take efforts to friend the lonely. Don’t just use your chore efforts to help your family, but share them with someone else. Look for ways your skills at your paid jobs can help Jesus’ work in this world.

C. Help others flourish
So we carry out God’s job description to all humans to manage and develop His creation by (1) sustaining & developing God’s natural creation, (2) by adding to the common good and (3) by using our work to help others flourish. This is a people focus that is easy to lose but makes life richer when we remember.

- Years ago, we had a weekday children’s program called Adventure Club which my wife was a leader in. When the meetings were at our house (missing my calling as an efficiency consultant) I noticed they could have completed their meeting in less than 1/2 the time & gotten everything done. But their sidetracks were to come alongside each other as leaders and encourage one another in different situations of life. They were helping each other flourish not just AC.
- We have paid a couple of work crews do specialty items on our home lately and you can tell the teams that work well together – they don’t just do their own job but also freely help each other. They are helping each other flourish.
- It is refreshing to work with leaders of different churches without ego – you can freely promote their work even though yours may not be mentioned and God honors that. Because we are helping other churches flourish
- Aren’t most of Bible instructions about relationships showing us how we can help another flourish rather than how can we get what we want?

Our work takes on greater significance when we include the desire to help others flourish as part of what we are doing. Take this next week – don’t do anything different, but just observe these three areas in your work, chores, school, service for Jesus, or overcoming handicaps. Is there anything I am doing to sustain or develop God’s creation? Is there anywhere that I am adding to the common good? Is there anyone I am helping to flourish? Don’t worry if you think you aren’t doing well, don’t think you must change jobs & don’t try to instantly change. Instead let yourself positively dream — what could I do right where I am, that could sustain or develop something in God’s creation, or add to the common good or help someone else flourish. No pressure, just be positive – then see if God opens a door for you.