

# OpenTheo

## Joseph Minich on Work

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Today I am joined by Joseph Minich, who has just written a very short booklet on the subject of work for the Davenant Institute (get a copy here: <https://davenantinstitute.org/davenant-digests>).

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## Transcript

Hello and welcome back to another episode. I've been joined today by my friend Joseph Minich, who's just written a book, *What is Work For?*, a booklet for the Dabnett Institute, and I've invited him on to tell us a bit about it. Welcome to the show.

Oh, thank you. So what is your book about? What's it for? Yeah, so it's a little small booklet that I developed out of a lecture I gave at the recent Dabnett Institute convivium, and basically what I'm trying to do is, I guess you could say, step behind a lot of the rhetorical divides that exist on political and economic issues between right and left over, you know, big government, small government, you know, freedom versus security, this sort of thing. These dialectics we tend to operate in, and the kind of culture warring

mentality that tends to create teams that are after a sort of total cultural victory with one another, in a culture where we're nevertheless actually have to live and work together.

And what I'm trying to do is step behind all of that as much as we can, and just take a fresh look. What I try to do is take a fresh look at the picture of mankind's relationship to creation and Genesis, and ask what kinds of very fundamental, kind of pre-ideological, if you will, just very fundamental things we can say about the relationship of man to the created order. And in observing those things, I guess what I want to do is say, here's maybe a normative picture of what God intended to create between man and the resources of the world, man in relationship to his labor.

And then take those kind of pieces, those little structures, and then map them over against economic and political conversations to see to what extent do these various ways of stating things, these various paradigms, to what extent do they honor versus perhaps exist in tension with what seems to be these creational motifs, these emphases, it seems to me at least in the creation account. And, you know, the end result of that is not to come up with some new grandiose political theory, but really to maybe give a couple of more tools in the toolbox of evaluation, if you will, to help us sort through collectively on both sides, sort through perhaps ways of getting at these things that are surprising and maybe could help relieve some tensions or create hybrids that we don't tend to think are possible within the dialectic that we've established. Something like that.

Now, your book is very accessible. It's something that could be read by anyone from a young age onwards, is something that is quite readable and only is about 11 pages or something like that. I've found it helpful to look through it.

And I was wondering if you could identify some of the themes that come up in your reading of the opening chapters of Genesis that help us get an avenue into the subject of work. What would those insights be? Yeah, so three of the things that I, the booklet sort of toys with three sort of little group of ideas and sort of pulls them apart in various sections. And the three things that I try to identify are first that it seems to me that in Genesis, we have a picture of man in relationship to created resources, to a created world that has been given to him, given to them, both man and woman, as a gift by God, as a gift from God.

And it is the relationship established between man and world in that in Genesis and that protological picture is one of immediate unmediated access to the resources of creation. In other words, this is, there's a, the word I use there is there's a kind of birthright to the resources of the world given to man by God. And it seems to me that this should prejudice us toward thinking that that birthright and that relationship continue in man's relationship to creation.

Even though I recognize that with the growth of culture and this is complicated and there are mediating institutions which we can get into. But what I do nevertheless want to highlight there as a first importance is that unmediated access to created resources that man has as a birthright. We tend to talk about this in terms of, you know, nobody really owes you anything.

Here's not, the world, you know, the world doesn't owe you anything. There's a lot of rhetoric about, you know, sort of whining people, you know, sort of wanting to grab resources, this sort of thing. But you need to work hard to get.

And there's, there's to some extent in a bracketed way, there can be truth in those kinds of observations. But I don't want to, what I wouldn't want to say is that those observations negate a, negate a more primal truth that there is actually an existent birthright of man to the created order. And what that means in a political and modern context is, of course, difficult to say.

And that's where the task of wisdom comes in. So the, go on from there to two other things. Second point would be, it seems to me that work in the created order, our relationship to creation is also differentiated.

There does seem to be some, I mean, the initial task is be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue it, rule over it. And there is some, there is some differentiation of how Adam and Eve participate in those tasks. And it's, that's most obvious to us when we're talking about you know, their role in procreation, for instance, they have different, different kind of ways of getting at that common project.

And I think we should expect, and of course your work is illuminating this in all sorts of ways, we should expect that in all of it, in rule, and subduing the work, they inflect that common task differently. And we see an expansion of that differentiation, which, differentiation, which has something to do, perhaps with, you know, presumably with aptitude, as it turns out, women are much better at being pregnant than men. And even after the fall, we see in Genesis 4, it seems like you have Cain and Abel, you have one brother who's tilling, one brother who, one brother who seems to have this particular relationship to, to farming, and one brother has a particular relationship with animals.

In Genesis, you split up and you get these, the inventor of this and the inventor of that. And there does seem to be some normative pattern of aptitude being related to the kinds of tasks that we take up. So the original societal order has something to do with this.

And it's important to note that even in the church, we see this pattern continue in the church where the gifts, I mean, a lot of the New Testament emphasis on the gifts is just what you're good at. You know, we take what you're actually good at as a person, and through the spirit, we redeem that, and that becomes part of the way you plug into the

organism that is the church and bring it to fruition. So maybe another standard then we could say is, to what extent do modern, does modern societal ordering help or hinder, I guess you could say, the connection between our plugging into society and what we're actually, what our actual aptitudes and capabilities are.

And then finally, I talk about just the real importance in Genesis of boundaries. Genesis is, and I think the ancient Near Eastern world in general, of which it was a part in some ways, even though it speaks normatively and authoritatively into that world. There's a lot of emphasis on boundaries.

You know, there's the sea and the land, the upper waters, the lower waters. There's even a separation, separation might be the wrong word, but there's man and woman. There's distinctions between things, things that are after their kinds.

And one of the things that sin is, and one of the things that I think, one of the things that tends to rip society apart, whether it be in scripture or in ancient literature generally, is this transgression of boundaries. And one way in which I want to think through that, I guess, as society gets more complicated, is to what extent should we experience or factor in or feel, to use a yummy Pomo language, to what extent should we feel our limits with respect to one another? Feel a sense that other persons are sovereigns. They are, other human beings are rulers.

They're co-rulers of the world. That's how scripture depicts them and speaks about them. That's what it means to be in the image of God.

And to what extent should we be cautious, actually extremely cautious, that our rulership of the world does not negate or interfere with their God-given commission to be a cultivator of the world? And I think that value, I think that would, I think it's a metric. It's a good metric by which we can evaluate sort of how we think through all these questions in a modern context. So that's a pretty broad overview.

Of course, I say a broad overview. That's probably as long as the booklet. It's a very short book.

Yeah, yeah, that's right. But yes, you bring up a number of themes there that can be elaborated as we look through the chapters of Genesis. I think one thing that has always stood out to me in those opening chapters is the fact that God is one who works in creation.

God has a work week of his own. And then in chapter two, God creates man in his image and he trains man as a father would train his son within his trade. There is a process of equipping him, placing him within a realm of rule and then giving him the skills and the tasks that he can work on under God's supervision so that in time he'll be able to work more widely within the world.

There's always that implicit sense that man's work does not end with the garden, even if it begins there. There's gold in the land of Havila and it's good and it needs to be brought out of the earth and it needs to be brought into the garden. And so man can't remain in the garden all the time.

At some point he has to go out into the world. And as you say, there is that process of differentiation that would be presumed even then. When we talk about a theology of the sexes, for instance, one thing that I find interesting is how few people would really just ask the very basic questions of okay, who's going to build a bridge over the rivers? Who's going to go out and mine the gold? Is this going to be a joint endeavour or is there going to be a division of labour? And in almost any human society there is a division of labour, often very pronounced along gendered lines, simply because of different aptitudes that are associated with that.

Part of what it means to have dominion within the world is this meeting of the particular needs of the world with the particular gifts that God has given to us. But those gifts are always things that are for the sake of the greater good. And they're alike the fact that you brought in the example of the body of Christ where you have the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

They're always a ministration or a representation of the one gift of the Holy Spirit that is common to the whole body. And the notion of being part of the body within the New Testament that we find in 1 Corinthians 12 and elsewhere is an active membership. To be a member you have to be active in some way.

A member of the body is not just a passive member. It's part of bodily processes of forms of ministering to the common good. And where a body member is not participating in that, in some sense they're being cut off from the body.

They're being told, I have no need of you. You may demand things from me. I may do things for you.

But I have no need of you. And that need that we have for each other, the ministrations that we have of the one common gift for the sake of the whole, is something that seems to be essential to being in the image of God as that is connected with sonship, dominion. These are the themes that involve participation and involve some creative work within the world.

To what extent do you think that that, to use Jordan Peterson kind of language, to what extent do you think that fractures all the way down to the individual? One of the things that I've been reflecting on and thinking when I was writing this and more recently is how the modern, you know, in modern times we're very good at saying things like be yourself and this sort of thing. And, well, it's important to be very cautious about such language and it's inflected in all sorts of stupid ways. Nevertheless, it does, you know,

people even like Jordan Peterson or even Herman Bovink, interestingly, will talk about how the glory of God and even the image of God is actually, ultimately manifested in the kind of panorama that is sort of the collection, the collection of different ways of being the image of God.

And it seems to me that there's something to be said in this emphasis that I was trying to draw out of Genesis that perhaps in modern life, perhaps we're uniquely suited to, we're in a context where we have some unique capacity to see what this kind of vision of society would look like because we do actually have greater capacity to individuate, I think, in ways that a lot of cultures have not. And that can be a concern, but, you know, I also wonder if there's an opportunity there except I would want to add in this thing you just said that you do see something like this in the New Testament. There's this enormous spread of the one gift through the body, but the end goal of that individuation is actually the service of the body singular.

It's not the sort of go be yourself in a sort of self-promoting, you know, just express yourself in some public social media space kind of way. But it's actually individuation for the sake of the common, which I think is an interesting biblical tension that I think maybe modernity actually is something that can actually help us. Or it's perhaps a time when we can... Oh, sorry.

I have a kid here. Sorry about that. There are ways in which you can be a hand when you're connected to the body that you never could be if you were disconnected from the body.

Right. Pretty much all of the ways that you can be a hand. Yes.

Right. The same way if you're not part of society you lack freedom to act as someone who is really representing dominion within the world. Your dominion in the world is very much relative to other people within a wider society and that framework where you can serve people and be recognised as part of a larger whole.

Which moves me into another question about work. When we talk about work, we can often talk about your work as what you do to earn your keep. Right.

When we think about, for instance, I'll give the example of the baker who's feeding the village, providing bread for the village. The work that he's doing is not merely about earning his keep. That's part of it.

But there are many other aspects that will be brought to his work. A pride in his labour, a sense of skill and the ability to express his gifts and develop his gifts. It will be a matter of his standing within a community.

It's a formation of social capital as he's providing for the people of the village over many years. There's the establishment of a family trade, for instance, and business. The sense

of honour that he has in being able to provide for his own family.

The sense of community that he has with the other people trading within the marketplace. His communication of his own gifts for the service of the common good of the marketplace. Different people ministering their gifts to each other for the sake of that common good.

There's a lot of other things that could be mentioned besides that. It reminds me of a particular passage of Ruskin in *Unto This Last* where he talks about the five different professions within society. I'm trying to remember what he mentions.

He has the pastor, the soldier, the physician and something else, and then the merchant. He says all of these people have to give their lives for society, sometimes even at the point of death. What is their purpose? In the case of the physician, he has to care for the physical wellbeing of the society.

If there is a plague, he has to stay at his post. He can't leave it, even if it's at risk of death. In the case of the pastor, he needs to speak the truth.

He needs to defend the truth of God and speak that truth even at the threat of martyrdom. For the sake of the soldier, he needs to stand on the front line and protect the security of his people. In the case of the merchant, he wonders what is the point where the merchant might be called to give up his life? The merchant, he says, is one that has to provide for the wellbeing and provisioning of the society.

But within his society he saw such a denigration of the figure of the merchant, seeing the merchant purely being out for his own gain, his own selfless profit, that there was no sense of the merchant truly being a contributor to and participant in the common good of the life of the society as a whole, which reminds me a lot of what you're saying. Yeah, and it circles back to this point about aptitude and another sort of Petersonian insight that is he says something interesting along the lines of you've discovered, you're close to the meaning of life when you find whatever it is that you do that has sort of maximal effect on the people around you. In other words, you discover whatever it is, the way in which you plug in that creates more order, and the more you pursue it, the more ripple effects of good that it has on society.

There's something to be said for thinking about work as more than a means to making a living. It also has to do with the way in which you just plug into the body politic generally, and the way in which you actually feel yourself to have an effect on the body politic generally, not just sort of as a cog in a wheel but as a, you're actually quite an individual, and in some ways an irreplaceable contributor. I mean, it's not that the particular thing you do can't be done by anybody else, but you a baker, or my dad is an auto mechanic, they all have their own spin on what they're doing.

People go to them as opposed to a different person. There is an extension of you in whatever that labour is. And so, anyway, that's something that relates to what you're saying.

It reminds me of the quote from Scripture that I think George Washington particularly enjoyed about everyone sitting under their own vine and fig tree. The idea that a vine and a fig tree they're not just trees that you have in your garden, they're means of production. They're means by which you can act and produce things in the world, and more particularly, means by which you have dominion.

So you're not just working for big fig and mega olive, but you're actually producing something that is your own for the sake of your standing within the world, your place within society, a sense of your connection with the world that God has given you. The good of society is seen at that point where everyone has some place of dominion, that they can have a realm of their own, where they can have honour standing some place within society that is granted honour. Yeah, and it seems to me that a lot of political conversation is about people who do not experience themselves or do not tend to experience themselves as plugging into the body politic in any meaning giving way.

And a lot of the political frustration, even if expressed in imprudent or stupid ways or wrapped in bad political theology, nevertheless, it seems to me very often there is a legitimate frustration that is maybe given voice in an inarticulate way, but that is not easily dismissed just by refuting the idea, as it were, or refuting the kind of ideology in which it's wrapped. I think there's something underneath that ideology that a lot of times, an itch, if you will, that we don't scratch just by refuting the ideology itself. I often tell people in marriage, if your spouse comes to you and is upset with you and they give you all the arguments for why they're upset and you refute all the arguments, it doesn't usually turn out that the problem is solved.

Usually all those arguments are just a wrapping around something more primal. And I think we need to be attentive as a society to where do we see groups of people who don't tend to feel themselves as able or as having the capacity to plug into society in what ought to be ordinary and healthy and ways which, and again, this is where this can sound controversial, but I don't think it's wrong. To what extent are we dealing with a sense of violated birthright? I think that's a good question and I don't think that's I don't think that automatically suggests that we're trying to sell socialism or something like that.

I think we can talk about that honestly and forthrightly without immediately moving into some sort of political theory. But I think that's a way of putting it. I think it's also interesting to see how much common ground there is when you actually press down on these issues.

On different sides people will express these things differently and against different



antagonists. For some it will be big business, for some it will be big government and for some it will be both. But there's a sense of the need for people to have a claim in society a claim in their place in the world and not to have that threatened by some agency that would deprive them of it.

I think that's an important natural instinct that we have that we should not deny as you say. Yeah, and that's where what you just said is really the idea that there's more common ground than people expect and in fact one of the most frustrating things about the way we prosecute these things and you've written a lot about this about how social media has in particular has made this so much more difficult because it tends to make it very easy to polarize a wrong very theoretical and abstract kind of virtue signaling lines as opposed to seeing that we just in fact do live together. Like your neighbors I've mentioned this to you before but when I talk to my children and they fuss with each other and they can't really live together one thing you really do have to say to them is well whether you like it or not these are your siblings and you have to live with them.

Yes, I hear your frustration. Yes, you're probably never going to agree on this particular thing but somehow because they're there in this house you actually do have to find a way to live with them and one of the things that's frustrating in political discourse is that you don't see a lot of emphasis on that. That in fact we might be split along these lines but in fact we actually do co-own this country we're actually co-participants in this commonwealth and we actually have to work together to get anything done there's not a way around that and if we don't in fact we're moving in very dangerous directions to the extent that we don't think that we have to do that.

Inevitably as little kids in the home the solution to the little kids in the home is well we can just get rid of my siblings and hopefully they grow out of that but that seems to be the way we talk politically we try and develop our work to avoid actually having to work with certain people but yes I think some people have rightly observed particularly people talking about the benefits of the market that the market is a great means to create peace between people because they have to work together and they both benefit when they work together peacefully and when you have a society where people fail to work together it leads to the breakdown of markets, it leads to the breakdown of the sort of cooperation that leads to everyone prospering and so there's a natural break upon some of our polarization by merely the fact of work within the world. Yes that's a really interesting point and in fact I think several people have observed that a lot of the perception for instance of racial discord in America and there's no question about the fact of racial discord and the fact of racial tension but a lot of people have pointed out that especially among the working class on the actual ground races work together actually fairly well especially by historical standards on the ground in a lot of circumstances. There's actually a funny show on Netflix about working class communities in the 70s called F is for Family which I don't know if we're supposed to recommend things like this but there's a very heartfelt nevertheless kind of insights one

of the things it captures is interracial working class solidarity in the 70s in America that it's not that it wasn't it certainly wasn't ideal and there were all sorts of racial tensions but you could see the beginning the first steps actually toward some degree of mutual racial understanding just because we have to work together another thing in media that we see along these lines is American History X this famous film about racial tension in America what really causes this racist individual to overcome racism is actually having to be in prison and work in the laundry line with a black guy and it actually just is dwelling together and having being forced in a way to work together that sort of begins the process of actually helping to solve some of these issues and so yeah there's on the ground there is an ideological tension there is racial tension but right work is actually a very profound way mutual labor common project is a very profound way in which we see some of this fragmentation disintegrate in fact I have a very Christian example of this I have a very dear friend who has been very actively part of the radical left in the Pacific Northwest and in America the Pacific Northwest is sort of the mecca of the radical leftism but one of his he grew up as an evangelical Christian in Dallas and you know you think Dallas is sort of the mecca of Big Eva in America but he would say that he saw more racial actually more racially progressive activity now that does not mean racially progressive talk the way they talked about it might be really you know to a lot of modern lefties but he said I actually saw a lot more racially progressive activity just co-labor in evangelical churches in the Dallas area than I've seen in most places in my entire life because actually when they get together and they gather around the table and they have these communities and are doing these common activities of being a part of a church and this is not a Christian person saying this I actually saw a lot of evangelical churches I went in they really did not care about race like in any meaningful sense once people walked through the door and so there's actually the work liturgy is the work of the people right the work of coming together for worship as it turns out is another instance where we see this pattern Now some of the things we've mentioned already are suggesting that work is not mere toil that work is a means of forming forging community it's a means of finding dominion in the world it's a means of having the dignity of expressing what it means to be the image of God.

How do you think people within churches who may find themselves in very constrained working circumstances where they feel that they are toiling how do you think they can find the dignity of true Christian labor within their situation? Yeah and that I think is in some ways one of the most crucial questions because it's a lot of times when people talk about these issues it's in a very abstract way and it's in ways that it's very difficult to see how this could mean anything in the modern world and in fact in the modern world for the most part we all do have to go out and get jobs and for the most part they're not, maybe not for the most part but very often at least very often they're not particularly fulfilling you know they're in part very frustrating they can feel very alienating but you have to do them and one of the things I try to talk about in the pamphlet and I think you see this in the New Testament is that the New Testament in a way takes the opposite of

the revolutionary impulse on this. The revolutionary impulse would be the impulse that says well you know I see these circumstances they're not ideal I feel alienated my birthright has been stolen so basically now all of my efforts all of my efforts need to go into restoring this you know other system so that I can function as a full human being within that context and it's not that there's nothing to be said and in fact it's not that there's not a lot to be said for progress and social change for the role of the lesser magistrate in context of injustice all of these things nevertheless it seems to me that the New Testament talks a lot to slaves for instance it talks a lot to people who have unjust masters and what I think it tries to get us to do is to reconceive to reconceive of our non-ideal circumstance to reconceive of it in a way where we actually are carrying out the human condition excuse me carrying out the human commission the original human commission by means of of loving people in the context of that labor so wives with very difficult husbands it says things like win them without a word it says for people with unjust masters to be good to those masters and the idea there is in some sense it's the opposite of the victim mentality it's not just saying shut up and be quiet and do this thing because this is your job and the quieter and more abused you are that's the more godly you are it's actually saying reverse the roles actually you be active you serving King Christ and take on this vocation of actually doing something active and cultivating and very powerful in the world that actually does confront people again you're winning him without a word you're doing work that's supposed to have an effect and you can do that that task of loving others that task of dying to ourself and trying to invest in another human being a human being who is unjust to us is in some way that what I try to argue in the little pamphlet there is almost the primal core of the human commission it's the core of the human commission from which we cannot be alienated now on top of that we can say Paul will say things like hey if you can get your freedom go get it so it's not that this is at all against or maybe if you're a slave in the south in 1861 maybe Paul would say hey if you can run to the north go do it but a lot of times you don't have any of that you're just where you are and I think what Paul is saying is hey if there's nothing you can do in this circumstance this is just where you're at don't just sit back and think there's nothing you have to do you actually have plenty to do before God that actually can have an effect on the world you can take rulership you can be a ruler in that context via the restoration via the identity that God has given you and what God says about you and really in a sense what you really are one way of saying this is you really are a ruler over this world so be one wherever you are and that's not going to scratch all the itches but I think for people who feel frustrated in their circumstances emphasizing that they do not lack a certain kind of agency to fulfill a very really the most primal aspect of the human commission can actually be encouraging and help them reconceive of what they're doing in their daily tasks basically so it's one way. And recognizing how integral dominion is to the image of God in scripture can also inform the way that we treat others the people that we work with the people that we work for the people whose services we have that we use on various occasions whether that's someone who is serving as a counter or someone who's a waiter or a waitress someone who's our boss whoever it is there are

ways in which this informs not just our attitude to ourselves but our attitude to our neighbour Yes and this is a really crucial point it's very easy in a society that is so built around the market and there's lots of good effects of that there's lots of things that come out of that that we like it is perhaps uniquely easy for us to instrumentalize people or treat them as mere instruments and there's that lovely of course I'm going to butcher it but there's that lovely quote of Louis where he talks about anytime you encounter anybody no matter how hideous no matter how you know if it's that creepy old lady on the bus you need to imagine that this person is the kind of being that one day could be so glorious that you would be tempted to fall down and worship them you really do need and that's actually who they are that's what they are more fundamentally than whatever sort of calibrated system you're filtering them through and that should more inform your posture toward them and that's where the sense of limits comes in if you feel like I'm standing in front of a king I would feel tremendous limitation in the way that I speak to you and treat you and I think the Bible would have us think that way I'm reminded talking about this about Luther's work on the freedom of a Christian and his approach to justification and the way that that informs our attitude towards authorities towards each other and towards ourselves and towards God I think is very much informing his approach to vocation and the sort of approach that we can take to work in this conversation.

Yeah and one of the claims you know one of his original claims in that work and it's something that we probably soften too easily but it's shocking to read Luther say the Christian is the perfectly free Lord of all subject to none and that is I think Luther means that in as shocking a way as it sounds now he has a theology to account for why we still exist in relationships of submission and some degree of hierarchy and yet that's not a negation of that fundamental insight he has there which absolutely has to factor into our relationships and the way we conceive of the way in which we are in relationship with others In terms of our Christian practice worship other things like that how do you see a positive attitude and Christian understanding of work playing into that and informing our weekly practice So that sigh means that was a good question and it's not something I've especially as it pertains to worship and it's a really interesting question it's not one to which I have given a great deal of thought I So I'm going to shoot off the cuff it does seem to be that one thing that this would say to us as churches is to be cautious about willfulness in relationship to the liturgy or to the various ways in which we form liturgy a lot of times there's so much ink that's been spilled on worship wars on music choice especially music choices and it seems to me that when we think of worship certainly we do need to have conversations about what's appropriate and what's fitting for worship and unfitting and have a rubric for determining that and yet at the end of the day it is a sacrifice of the people to God in this common collective action and I think maybe sometimes we're overly we're overly ideological and idealistic about what that common sacrifice actually looks like and perhaps we're overly focused on wanting to perfect that sacrifice and remove this spot or that spot in a very abstract way rather than cultivating

the sacrifice we're actually making as it actually exists in an immediate way for the benefit of others and to make this a more pleasing aroma to Christ I don't know if that says anything but intuitively at least it seems to me that minimally speaking the attitudes I perceive in a lot of the worship wars ironically are very individualistic a lot of people like to talk about liturgy and talk about all these things because this is what's good for people but the attitude with which that's expressed is actually just very individualistic and it really comes down to I have good taste and I have better taste and know what's more God honoring and you guys don't and yet I know enormous amounts of people that if you sat them in front to put them in church and tried to get them to sing Jesus Priceless Treasure which is a wonderful hymn and has wonderful words they just wouldn't be able to get over the tomb they wouldn't be able to make it part of their common sacrifice in a way that flowed from them in the same way and I think that's important that's an important consideration when we're talking about a common project of worship so maybe that's one way I'm curious to hear what you might say to that question I think there are a number of ways in which worship punctuates our time of labor so we work for six days and then we rest and the fact that we rest we're not just recharging we're not just developing our strength again in a way that we can go back to the toil the point of rest is not leisure either it's something more than that it gives us a perspective upon the rest of the week of work it's something that in the new covenant we begin our week with rest and that beginning with rest is out of the finished work of Christ and we participate in the work of God in the creation transform the creation and we bring the fruits of our labor to God we bring our bodies to God the bodies by which we labor we present our limbs and organs as the members of Christ as a living sacrifice we present the gifts that we have formed I mean even bread and wine don't naturally form they have to be formed by human labor and they are means of communion within tokens of our labor when we think about our work more generally it's something that I think flows out from a posture of work that can flow out from a posture of worship and then flow into that act of worship because we bring the fruits of our labor we bring our bodies as means of labor and then there's also other ways that I think worship involves a posture towards our labor there's a reflection upon what we have done in the past week repentance for what we have done wrong and then a commission at the end we're sent out to work to make a difference upon the world and to work together in love and all of that I think it gives us a sense of the end of our labor the end of our labor is feasting and feasting together as one within the kingdom of God it's not just a matter of self aggrandizement or a means of storing up treasure for ourselves but we're people who are ministering to each other to the wider body and I think that orients the majority of our labor yeah that's I find that really helpful I find that really that's particularly interesting because to some extent what I can't remember if I mentioned this in the book letter in the lecture but while I'm reticent about all these kind of churches polis theologies that are walking around one thing that I think is nevertheless a grain of truth in them is the extent to which a gathered Christian community can nevertheless witness to a relationship of love a small group of people getting together and working together in

a way that's formed by love that can inform what is possible writ large when things are ordered according to love and it's interesting to think that's a very radically old protestant way to think about work is that it's just loving your neighbor writ large that's all it is the command to love your neighbor is that's the ground zero of how we govern society is inflecting each person through the command to love your neighbor and so yeah I find that really interesting I've also found it helpful just to think in terms of presenting myself as a laborer and the fruits of my labor to God in worship that there is an act there that gives dignity to what I'm doing in the rest of the week that I'm not just doing it as toil to put food on the table I'm doing it and keep a roof over my head I'm doing it to the glory of God I'm doing it as a vocation not just as a means of provision for myself yeah and that's a really interesting point that to think one wonders how would these conversations change if we thought of human vocation as innately ordered to just as we talked about the gifts being ordered to the body our individual vocation and even our we could expand that circle our family you could then say our town you could say our country or whatever are meant to be ordered toward even though there is some care of the self in all of these structures but they're ordered out from themselves in their own way the father is ordered toward his home to cultivate this home but the home is then ordered to other homes and there's meant to be this kind of outward looking the telos of this labor is meant to involve even if it's taking care of your own needs and being satisfied with what you do it nevertheless has to be connected in some organic way to the blessing of what's around you it's really in a way the spread of the garden it's not done by neglecting the garden it's not done by failing to cultivate the inner space of the garden in fact it's precisely by cultivating the inner space of the garden that you learn to expand it push it outward there's pretty much a reciprocal relationship there in Genesis 2 the way the woman is created because it's not good for the man to be alone but what is the man alone in? he's alone in his vocation and he needs someone to assist him in an outward movement into the world she's not just there to keep him company she's someone to be part of this greater mission within the world I think along with that one of the reasons why the family is so weak today is because it's not really bearing much weight it doesn't really have much business entrusted to it and when families do not have a lot of weight of work placed upon them they do not have the same dignity they do not have the same weight more generally right and in a way you can see perhaps you can perhaps see that reflected also in the identity crisis that's existing also in political institutions you see sort of it's not the family is bearing little weight but then you see the increasing decline of the small town and you also see this sort of constant in I think most western countries a constant attempt to kind of rebrand what the country's about and its relationship to even larger kind of global patterns and this sort of thing but there's very little sense of a kind of secure identity I guess you could say at any point in this series of concentric circles I wonder whether that's part of the appeal that activism has in some quarters that activism gives you a sense of dominion gives you a sense of agency in the world where it's been sapped from you in many other places right and this is an instinct I can't say that it's fully formed but one instinct I have about these things is that we need

to develop a because the trajectory of all these things is kind of globalization right it's kind of the disintegration of all the particulars and this sort of big global thing whatever it is however you want to describe that but it seems to me that one thing that would help sort of from the top down even conceptually is to think of what is a Christian notion of globalization how does it do it there's completely legitimate concerns about the trajectory of globalization and how that consumes individual and national identities but there's also perhaps something good about some good aspects of globalization and one of the things I'd want to think about is what Christianity itself I mean part of the thing that makes this peculiar for us and a little awkward is that Christianity if anything is a globalizing force in some ways it's Christianity itself in fact says in one place that the this is I think only translated in English in one little dissertation but there's a quote of Bavinck where he says something like the greatest apologetic for Christianity in the world is just how successful it is in all the pagan countries that he's seeing in the 19th century and so there's this universalizing element to the Christian movement that is not historically untied to the forces of globalization even though those are highly associated with economic forces and all sorts of things that can be bad as well but it seems to me that one thing that we need to think through is can those things be pulled apart and can they be can that process be done in such a way that honors the individual those concentric circles all the way down in a way that supports nations and their individuality in a way that supports states and towns and then families and then individuals you know in their integrity and so and I don't you know I don't have anything particularly profound to say about that except to say my instinct is that we actually need to develop a language of globalization that's positive and that actually preserves all of that distinctiveness all the way down there will be a centralization of human dominion in a way that deprives most people of that actual dominion and ends up with people being subject to that vast and great dominion without actually having any agency or participation in it themselves Right and really yeah and really what we yes yeah that's exactly right that's the danger and the tension here is that it's for all intents and purposes somewhat inevitable that it's going to go this direction and so in a sense it's I don't want to say if you can't beat them join them but I do want to say that these the world is becoming connected and is increasing and will continue to become connected in ways that really upset the way in which we've held these things together the equilibrium within which we've held all this together and I think one of the projects of Christian wisdom that we have is trying to redevelop an equilibrium a new equilibrium that holds everything together in this particular lived context I think that's important that we're not going to work back to something that pre-existed there's no way back even if we would want to go back which we shouldn't rather we need to think our way through the current situation towards something new Right and that's so when we talk about these subjects we talk about this access to resources when we talk about this centrality and the essential importance of the family and in some sense lament its disintegrating influence and burden bearing that it has historically had Right we're in a sense recovering nevertheless by doing something new and that's what's very difficult as most it seems to me that most of the conversation

I see is an attempt to stop the forces you know or something like that it's always it's stopping some sort of march forward I don't want to put it in progressives terms but it's stopping some inevitable process and getting it back to something and it just seems to me that's unrealistic and therefore just a waste of time really you know what if we're going to talk about these things it seems to me we have to talk about them in the lived world that we're in and this is the lived world we're in I doubt that Paul's counsel to the slaves can be very important that we recognize our situation the limits that pertain to it, recognizing there may be outlets, there may be opportunities for freedom that we could pursue and we should pursue if they're open to us but when we do not have those opportunities open to us we should nonetheless be involved in deepening our sense of our agency, our dominion within the constraints that we find ourselves within and finding the dignity that we can pursue within that. Right, right and one of the things the Westminster Confession says in the larger catechism and I quoted in that in the pamphlet is on the commandment not to steal and one of the implications it draws from that commandment is that you need to be about actually improving your own outward estate I mean it's actually not stealing is partially fulfilled by the improvement of your own outward estate but also by improving the outward estate of your neighbor and I find that such a it's actually quite explicit that part of what is in this command is not just protecting and preserving but furthering the outward estate of your neighbor and so there's this deep sense of there's this deep sense of reason in fact it's neglect, you are in fact one of the agents of God's rule, you actually are a valuable ruler of God over this earth and so your outward estate actually does matter and there's every reason to invest in it, to invest in the health of your body and these sorts of things but also in a way that actually serves to advance the outward estate of your neighbor and I find that fascinating, coming from the Westminster divines There's a lot of fascinating stuff particularly in the large catechism on things to do with stealing, with unjust enclosures, things like that, it would be fascinating to read it. To talk about Westminster economics yeah, that might be a little scary yeah.

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