Work & Rest

David Jones · Genesis 1:26-31; Genesis 2:1-3; Genesis 4:20-22; Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:15; Matthew 11:28-30

AT A GLANCE

David Jones continues the Genesis 1–11 series, picking up where last week's account of God, the world, and the image of God left off, and turns to work and rest in Genesis 1:26–2:3. He argues that both are God-designed rhythms of image-bearing, that sin twists them into idolatry and indulgence, and that Jesus' finished work restores them. Next week the series moves to marriage in Genesis 2.

- Work precedes the fall and arrives as a blessing; the frustration of work is the fallen part, but the calling itself is divine.
- Every honest task, from writing code to caring for a child, imitates God by bringing order out of disorder and loving a neighbor.
- Rest is a declaration of freedom: we stop because God rules the world, and Jesus has finished the work that saves us.

> *"Resting is an act of defiance against the idol of productivity. It declares God is running the world, not me."*

EXPOSITION

Scripture engaged

> Genesis 1:26-31 — [26]Then God said, "Now let's make humans who will be like us. They will rule over all the fish in the sea and the birds in the air. They will rule over all the large animals and all the little things that crawl on the earth." [27]So God created humans in his own image. He created them to be like himself. He created them male and female. [28]God blessed them and said to them, "Have many children. Fill the earth and take control of it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the air. Rule over every living thing that moves on the earth." [29]God said, "I am giving you all the grain bearing plants and all the fruit trees. These trees make fruit with seeds in it. This grain and fruit will be your food. [30]And I am giving all the green plants to the animals. These green plants will be their food. Every animal on earth, every bird in the air, and all the little things that crawl on the earth will eat that food." And all these things happened. [31]God looked at everything he had made. And he saw that everything was very good. There was evening, and then there was morning. This was the sixth

day. (ERV)

Genesis 2:1-3 — [1]So the earth, the sky, and everything in them were finished. [2]God finished the work he was doing, so on the seventh day he rested from his work. [3]God blessed the seventh day and made it a holy day. He made it special because on that day he rested from all the work he did while creating the world. (ERV)

Genesis 4:20-22 — [20]Adah gave birth to Jabal. Jabal was the father of people who live in tents and earn their living by keeping cattle. [21]Jabal was Jubal's brother. Jubal was the father of people who play the harp and flute. [22]Zillah gave birth to Tubal-Cain. Tubal-Cain was the father of people who work with bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-Cain was named Naamah. (ERV)

Exodus 20:8-11 — [8]"You must remember to keep the Sabbath a special day. [9]You may work six days a week to do your job. [10]But the seventh day is a day of rest in honor of the Lord your God. So on that day no one should work—not you, your sons and daughters, or your men and women slaves. Even your animals and the foreigners living in your cities must not work! [11]That is because the Lord worked six days and made the sky, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. And on the seventh day, he rested. In this way the Lord blessed the Sabbath—the day of rest. He made that a very special day." (ERV)

Deuteronomy 5:15 — Don't forget that you were slaves in the land of Egypt. The Lord your God brought you out of Egypt with his great power and made you free. That is why the Lord your God commands you to always make the Sabbath a special day. (ERV)

Matthew 11:28-30 — [28]"Come to me all of you who are tired from the heavy burden you have been forced to carry. I will give you rest. [29]Accept my teaching. Learn from me. I am gentle and humble in spirit. And you will be able to get some rest. [30]Yes, the teaching that I ask you to accept is easy. The load I give you to carry is light." (ERV)

The argument

Work Is a Blessing Given in Paradise, Not a Burden Imposed by the Fall — Subdue and have dominion mean stewardship, not exploitation

David Jones observes that the first commands in the Bible involve no prayer, Bible study, or church attendance: "the Bible doesn't begin there." Of the five commands in Genesis 1:28, the first three fill the earth with God's images. The last two, subdue and have dominion, name the work: "Images are what we are. Subdue and have dominion are something we are called to do." They arrive as blessing: "It's a blessing to be put to work." The Hebrew words, kabash and radah, "do not mean exploitation" but stewardship, shaping creation's raw potential into culture. Even after the fall, Genesis 4 records tent-dwellers, musicians, and metalworkers, while Babel is the same project aimed at making a name for ourselves.

> **Insight —** *Work belongs to the good creation, so what the fall introduced was work's frustration, not work itself.*

All Work Imitates the Creator, Which Ends Both Ranking and Compartmentalizing — Bringing order out of disorder, animated by love of neighbor

We cannot create out of nothing, but we imitate God by "bringing order out of non-order and beauty out of what is not yet developed or matured": the farmer cultivating soil, the musician ordering notes, the banker clarifying numbers, even the hairstylist. Jones traces the ranking of work to the Greco-Roman prizing of contemplation over manual labor, and calls it "a recipe for bringing shame, pain, and disorder into your life." Building a spreadsheet, repairing a sink, and caring for a child all carry raw potential toward maturity. Love should animate it all, and he offers a faithful summary of Luther: "God doesn't need your good works, but your neighbor does." Guilt that you are not a foreign missionary signals a compartmentalized faith.

> **Insight —** *No honest vocation is ordinary, because each one is a channel of God's blessing and love into the world.*

Rest Is Holy Time God Gave Before We Had Done Anything — The seventh day is the first thing Scripture calls holy

Jones points out that the seventh day is the first thing the Bible calls holy, and it is "not a place. It's not a building. It's not a tabernacle. It's a period of time." God did not rest from fatigue: "Omnipotence doesn't get exhausted." He rested to delight in his work, "like an artist stepping back to contemplate her work," and the Sabbath command in Exodus 20 links back to this. Humanity's first full day was the day off: "God makes man and woman on the sixth day and then he gives them the next day off." Rest supplies enjoyment, physical refreshment, spiritual renewal, and perspective: "It's going to be okay without me managing everything." He also notes that the seventh day lacks the evening-and-morning refrain, leaving it open-ended.

> **Insight —** *Because rest was given before any work was done, your worth was never meant to rest on what you produce.*

We Cannot Rest Because We Are Enslaved to Lesser Lords — Sabbath rests on creation in Exodus and on liberation in Deuteronomy

Why do we keep grinding when we know we should stop? Jones's diagnosis is that "we're enslaved" to the notion that success gives us meaning and that stopping lets someone else get ahead. Exodus grounds the Sabbath in creation; Deuteronomy 5:15 grounds it in Egypt: "You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt." Slaves had no Sabbath, and their worth was tied to their bricks. Citing Judith Shulavitz, a Jewish-American journalist, he hears the Sabbath as a weekly declaration: "Resting is a declaration of freedom and of allegiance." The masters vary: parental expectations, perfectionism, winning, busyness that buries what we won't face. Rest turned to self-indulgence is no cure. "Resting is an act of defiance against the idol of productivity."

> **Insight —** *Our inability to rest exposes whom we are serving, and obeying the Sabbath is a way of declaring that God alone is Lord.*

Christ Finishes the Work and Gives the Rest We Failed to Keep — From garden to garden city through the true image of God

Jones says the Bible begins in a garden and ends in a city, "a garden city," with God's purposes prevailing despite human sin. We have "egregiously failed as royal representatives," treating work as proof of worth and rest as escapism. Jesus, the true unmarred image, lived faithful work, and his cry on the cross, "it is finished," echoes Genesis: God rested because creation was done, and Jesus declares the work of saving done. He took on "the labor of undoing what we have done." Rest is therefore offered now, in Matthew 11: "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." When this clicks, work becomes love of neighbor and rest becomes something we eagerly want.

> **Insight —** *Only the finished work of Jesus frees us to work without proving ourselves and rest without escaping ourselves.*

Cross-references

- Genesis 2:19-20 — God invites Adam to name the animals, showing humans are drawn into the work of culture
- Genesis 11:1-9 — Babel as culture-building aimed at making a name for ourselves rather than God's glory
- Isaiah 40:28 — God does not grow weary or faint, so his rest was not exhaustion
- Exodus 23:12 — Sabbath given so that we may be refreshed
- Leviticus 23:3 — Sabbath as a day of holy convocation, grounding spiritual renewal in shared worship
- Matthew 22:37-39 — Love of God and neighbor as what should animate all work
- Colossians 3:17 — Whatever we do is to be done for God's glory, ending the sacred-secular divide
- Colossians 1:15 — Jesus as the true and eternal image of God
- John 19:30 — "It is finished" read against God's finished creation work
- Hebrews 4:1-11 — The open-ended seventh day pointing to the promise of eternal rest Jesus gives

DEVOTIONAL

Picture Adam's first full day. He has just been made, and the sun that rises over him lights no assignment he has failed and no deadline he has missed. The day is simply given, blessed and made holy, and there is nothing he could earn it with. Before he names an animal or tends the ground, he is invited to look at what God has made and to take delight in it alongside him. Then the work comes, and it comes as blessing: soil to cultivate, notes to arrange, disorder waiting to become beauty. Nothing in the garden hints that labor is a punishment. The ache we feel in it is a later inheritance, a crooked thing our hearts do with good gifts, making work a throne and rest a hiding place. Notice that the seventh day never closes. There is no evening and no morning; the pattern that marked every other day simply stops, like a door left open. We have lived long on the wrong side of that door, bricks stacking beside us, counting our worth by what we make. Yet on a cross Jesus said, it is finished, and the door swung wide. So the hands that write code, nurse patients, mend sinks, and raise children can open. What they carry is not our productivity but the King's likeness, stamped on us before we lifted anything. We labor as those already loved. We rest as those already freed.

Reflection

- Which of your tasks do you quietly rank as meaningless or mundane, and how would it look different if you saw it as imitating God?
- What master do you serve when you cannot stop working or resting well: expectations, perfectionism, winning, or busyness that buries something you'd rather not face?
- What would it mean for you to believe that the world keeps spinning without your managing it, and what would you do with an unhurried day?

Closing prayer

Father, we thank you for the beauty of your design: that we are your images, and for the work you have called us to do. Whatever overwhelms us today, let us feel the sweetness of your rest filling our souls. Let us see our work as a way of honoring you and loving our neighbor. Our hearts and gifts are whacked, so sort us out by your Spirit. Renew us, remake us, forgive us, cleanse us, restore us, whether for the first time ever or the millionth. In Jesus' name, amen.

FORMATION

One thing to remember

Work and rest are one rhythm, and Jesus has already finished the labor that saves you.

This week

This week, choose one block of time, an afternoon or a day, and stop working entirely. Begin by reading Matthew 11:28-30 aloud, then name in prayer one thing you fear will fall apart without

you, and hand it to Christ. Receive the hours as a gift, not a reward.

Return to **Matthew 11:28-30**