

## **Developing A Christian Mind: Why All Of Life Matters**

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Rich Nathan  
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Psalm 119:105

Psalm 119:105 says:

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

The call upon us as Christians is not primarily to study the intricacies of the light. So many followers of Christ, especially coming from the evangelical side of the church spend all of their time studying the light. They can tell you the names of all of King David's sons. They can tell you the order of the seven trumpets in the Book of Revelation. They can tell you the longest verse in the Bible, which by the way, I believe is Esther 8:9, which has 72 words in the TNIV. They can tell you the middle verse of the Bible, which is Psalm 118:8:

At once the royal secretaries were summoned—on the twenty-third day of the third month, the month of Sivan. They wrote out all Mordecai's orders to the Jews, and to the satraps, governors and nobles of the 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush. These orders were written in the script of each province and the language of each people and also to the Jews in their own script and language.

But a lamp is not something that you stare at. You don't put in a light bulb and stare at the light. The purpose of a lamp is not to illuminate itself, but to illuminate other things.

And the purpose of God's Word is not simply that you and I would study the intricate relationships that exist between one text and another, or be able to share with someone else Bible trivia. The purpose of studying the Bible is so that the Bible becomes a light for us to illuminate all of the rest of life.

There is a popular Christian saying which goes,

Life is 10% about what happens to you, and 90% about how you read what happens to you.

The Bible is God's gift to us to assist us in reading life. How do we interpret what is going on in our world? What we desire to produce here at Vineyard Columbus are people who read life in the light of the scriptures. Some people call that thinking Christianly, or having a Christian worldview, or biblical worldview. I'm calling it today, "Developing a Christian mind." Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% about how you read what happens to you.

Let me give you an illustration from the Bible. It comes from the Old Testament book of Job. You know the story. Job suffered the loss of his property, his children, and his health. Job suffered a series of tragedies. But what made Job's suffering particularly awful is that his so-called friends interpreted Job's suffering as God's punishment on Job because of Job's sins. "Job, you must have deserved this. You must have brought this on yourself."

Now, there are times, friends, when that is the proper interpretation for what we are going through. If we steal, we might get caught and punished. If we use drugs, we might find ourselves addicted. If we neglect our studies, we might fail a class. If we have sex, we might end up pregnant, or getting a girlfriend pregnant. If we neglect our relationships, we might end up lonely. Job's suffering might have to be the result of his sin.

It is not that Job's friends were communicating something that is utterly false in all circumstances. It is just that in Job's particular case, they applied the wrong truth. They did not understand that there was a test of Job's faith going on here. They did not understand that there was a test of Job's commitment to God going on here. On top of his suffering, Job was loaded down with misapplied truths, with horrible counsel, with a false interpretation of his life. That's why the job of Christian counseling is so important and such a great responsibility. So often people have a problem and go to a friend or counselor and get the wrong interpretation of the problem. Christian counseling exists to help people to interpret their life in the light of God's Word.

Developing a Christian mind assists us to live life in the light of the whole counsel of the Bible. Let me give you an illustration.

Let's be honest and say that we followers of Jesus do not think Christianly about whole slices of life. For example, let's take the world's largest contemporary conflict, the conflict between the Muslim world and the West. Let's just, for a moment, consider that one-fifth of the planet that is Muslim, from Senegal to Indonesia, and from Germany to Columbus, Ohio. The planet is filled with Muslims. You probably know that there are over 25,000 Somali Muslims in Columbus, Ohio, not to mention thousands of Muslims from other places like Iran, Iraq, North Africa, and the Middle East. But there are tens of thousands of Muslims living in Central Ohio. We encounter Muslims especially from Somali backgrounds everywhere we go – in the grocery store, at the playground where our kids play, at our children's schools, and in the hospitals.

Let me speak to followers of Jesus here. Be honest, in your own heart, what is your basic view of Muslims? If we were to take a survey and ask the average American Christian what do you think of Muslims, who make up one-fifth of our planet? For many Christians we would probably get two responses:

1. Muslims are terrorists.

2. The goal of my interaction with Muslims is to not be killed by them.

Would it be fair to say, friend that for many of us our viewpoints regarding Muslims are more shaped by Fox News than they are shaped by the Bible. Do you think that the average Christian, when put on the spot, could come up with even five verses regarding how we are to relate to Muslims?

Your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

We are to interpret all of life in the light of the scripture. How are we to relate to our Muslim neighbor or Muslims overseas?

Well, there are lots of starting points for our thinking. You aren't going to go far wrong, if you start with Matthew 7:12:

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

And in sharp contrast to the viewpoints you might hear on TV, on the radio, and even on Christian radio, you are probably not going to far wrong, if you meditated deeply upon the Sermon on the Mount, and particularly Matthew 5:43-48:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' <sup>44</sup> But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup> If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? <sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

As we followers of Jesus consider how we are to relate to Muslims, a good starting point may be a deep reflection upon the parable of the Good Samaritan. We might remind ourselves of the Bible's message that every human being is created in the image of God, loved by God, sought by God, died for by God, cared for by God, ultimately to be judged by God.

But you know there are whole slices of life that we as followers of Jesus have not allowed the light of God's Word to shine upon. How many followers of Jesus are afraid of modern science? We haven't been able to really engage with contemporary physics, or contemporary biology. I'm so glad for Christians who are not just negatively critiquing contemporary science, or attacking scientists. I'm so glad for faithful followers of Jesus who are making positive contributions in the area of science, or in university English departments, philosophy departments, or liberal arts departments. And if you are doing that, friend, God

bless you. May you continue to make a positive contribution in the name of Jesus.

Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Let me apply this in a different way. So many young adults raised in conservative Christian homes and churches avoid certain areas of study in college and avoid even considering certain legitimate career options. They hear, "You better not study biology or consider becoming a biology researcher or a geneticist. Biology departments are run by Darwinists and they will destroy your faith."

"Don't study philosophy. Philosophy professors are atheists. Don't major in women's studies or pursue art or dance or theatre in a secular setting. These areas are all hostile to Christian faith."

Now, it may be true that Christians encounter tremendous hostility in certain university departments and certain career fields. But could part of the problem be that Christians have stopped pursuing these fields, leaving even less of a Christian witness in these areas? If Christians refuse their calling to be salt and light in any legitimate area, is it any wonder certain disciplines become dark and certain pursuits become corrupt? Benjamin Warfield, a conservative Presbyterian theologian in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century lived at a time of great upheaval in science of the advent of Darwin's theory of evolution in physics with Einstein's theory of relativity, in psychology with Freud's, in art with Picasso. Yet, he saw the need not to wall Christians off from various fields, but to call Christians to full engagement of the world that God created.

Listen to Warfield's words:

We must not, then, as Christians, assume an attitude of antagonism toward the truth of philosophy or the truths of science, or the truths of history, or the truths of criticism. As children of the light, we must be careful to keep ourselves open to every ray of light. Let us, then, cultivate an attitude of courage as over against the investigations of the day. None should be more zealous in them than we. None should be more quick to discern truth in every field, more hospitable to receive it, more loyal to follow it, whithersoever it leads.

What we need, brothers and sisters, are more masses of Christian young people with lots of courage and some intellectual firepower to pursue graduate degrees and fill secular university departments. What if the head of the philosophy department at OSU or the English department at Otterbein, or the biology department at some secular school; what if a State Senator or a star athlete, or the head of a dance troupe, or the editor of the local newspaper was a thorough-going, committed Christian who sought to live out his or her faith in an attractive, consistent way.

Young people are always searching for models. What if a student upon graduation said, “You know, the person I respected most in college was my journalism professor and she was a committed Christian. The best director in our department was a sincere follower of Jesus.”

Can you imagine what would happen if instead of raising our kids to be defensive and afraid of learning, afraid of certain discipline, we raised confident kids who could fully engage with the best and the brightest by this one advantage – our kids have the Word of God to serve as a lamp for our feet and a light for our paths, our kids don’t have to stumble around searching for light. What if we assisted people in our church to develop fully Christian minds to be able to engage all of life?

I would love to have a church community that is constantly wrestling with how to apply God’s Word to all of life, all of life. I would love to have a church community of people who are constantly pushing the borders. “Hey, what about this issue? How are we going to think about that?” Do we just have to fall back to the default mode of what standard, conventional religion teaches, or will we be engaged, struggling, wrestling, and being humble enough to admit that we don’t have all the answers.

Our Community Center that is being opened next week represents a decision by this church to engage the community, to not hide from this city’s problems, to not wall ourselves in to some Christian sub-culture that somehow by God’s grace, accompanied by much prayer, to try to make a difference in every realm of life. I’ve called today’s talk, “Developing a Christian Mind: Why All of Life Matters.” Let’s pray.

#### The Problem: Missing the Beginning and the End of the Biblical Story

Why have we not been able to develop a Christian mind in much of the church in America? Why have we not been able to engage in biblical thinking about the whole of life?

One of the problems is that the evangelical portion of the church, of which Vineyard is a part, has narrowly focused all of our scriptural attention entirely upon the middle of the Bible - the cross and resurrection of Jesus. As empowered evangelicals, we’ve expanded the scope of our focus to include the signs of Jesus – healing, deliverance, prophecy, the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But because we have narrowly focused on the middle of the Bible story, salvation through Jesus, we have lost sight of the beginning and end of the story.

And so we’ve misdirected the biblical story in very unfortunate ways. We’ve filled in the blanks at the beginning and end of the story with philosophies borrowed from the secular world, or from mythology borrowed from the religious world.

And because we've neglected the beginning and the end of the biblical story, we've misdirected the story of the Bible.

So, for example, by following the Greek philosopher, Plato, we've directed the story of the Bible to our souls and not our bodies. By following secular American individualism, we've directed the story of the Bible to individuals rather than to the community of faith. We say we don't need church or fellowship to live the Christian life – me and Jesus are enough. By following the Greek philosophy of Plato, we directed the end of the story to heaven, rather than to the New Earth. In accordance to fundamentalist anti-intellectualism, we've had no regard for science. In accordance to fundamentalist rationalism, we've had no regard for the arts, or music, or dance.

We in the Vineyard need to tell the story of the Bible again and apply it for all its worth and apply it for ever realm of life.

Let me give you an illustration of the difference between the narrow focus of contemporary American church and the big focus of the Bible on all of life. I will use a simple boating illustration.

D.L. Moody, the great 19<sup>th</sup> century evangelist, described his calling and said that he essentially understood the world as being like an ocean liner that hit an iceberg. God had said to him, "Moody, it is your job to pull as many drowning people out of the water into life boats as you can." Of course, the iceberg is the fall of humanity and our judgment, and the people in the water are in danger of going to hell.

Now, that may have been Moody's calling. I don't fault him at all for his understanding of his particular calling. But this life boat theology, that really the only thing that matters is evangelism, pulling as many folks into life boats as you can, saving as many people as you can from hell, has been both a blessing and a great curse for contemporary evangelicalism. One the one had, it has created an evangelistic urgency. And Vineyard and churches like ours are growing because of this passion to rescue folks. Friend, if you are disconnected from God today, you don't need to stay that way. On the other hand, by narrowing the focus simply upon getting people to say the Sinner's Prayer, we have had almost nothing to say about whole slices of life.

Let me suggest an alterative theology – the Ark Theology. Noah's Ark not only saved people, it preserved God's other creatures as well. The covenant that God made with Noah and his descendents was not only with humanity, but we read in Genesis 9:10 these words:

and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth.

The rainbow that was an eternal sign was not just a sign between God and people, but we read in Genesis 9:12, 15 and 17 these words:

And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come:

I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life.

So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth."

The Ark Theology – that God intends to restore all of creation, every realm, every creature, every part. Or as Abraham Kuyper, the great Dutch theologian and politician said nearly 100 years ago,

"There is not a square inch of the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ who is sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'"

Do you believe this? Do you believe Christ desires to be Lord over all of life, not just religion, but politics and science and art and your entertainment choices, and your dating choices, and your eating choices and your spending choices and America's choice to go to war and the way Christians view Muslims.

Life Boat Theology: Jesus wants to be Lord of your life. Ark Theology: Jesus is Lord over the universe.

This is the message, by the way, of the Book of Daniel that God is God of the universe, not just "my God," or the "God of the people of Israel." So in dealing with Nebuchadnezzar Daniel says this in Daniel 2.21,

He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning.

And Nebuchadnezzar has to acknowledge in Daniel 2:47:

The king said to Daniel, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery."

Later Daniel points out to King Belshazzar in Daniel 5:18-23:

“Your Majesty, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor... 20 But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. 21 He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like the ox; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms on earth and sets over them anyone he wishes. 22 “But you, Belshazzar, his son, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this.

And later, still, Darius the Great had to decree in Daniel 6:26:

I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. “For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end.”

God is God not only of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but God is God of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Darius the Great. The Lord is God not only over the Christian church, he is God over the city of Columbus; this is what the community center is all about, all of life, not just the church going but also art, dance, sports, health, law, work and school. One God - over Hindus, Muslims, Animists, and Wiccans. One God – who is Lord of all and whose name is Jesus!

The Solution: Going back to the beginning of the story

The solution is that we need to go back to the beginning of the story. The Bible is a lamp to our feet and a light to our paths. There is so much light about life that we could draw from the beginning of Genesis. But let’s just focus our attention on three things:

### 1. Developing a Christian Mind About People

What does Genesis 1 tell us about people? We read in Genesis 1:26-27 these words:

Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” 27 So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

We learn that we are made, first of all, in “the image of God.” Now there are lots of different interpretations of what those words mean, “the image of God.” But certainly one of the implications of this phrase is that human beings are of great value. We may share 99.9% of our genetic material with chimpanzees and 60% of our genetic material with fruit flies, but yet we human beings, uniquely of all



creation, are said to be made in the image of God. That means every human being that you have ever encountered has great value in God's eyes.

This value was not lost when our first parents sinned. This value is never lost even when the person gravely sins. It is because we are made in the image of God that we are warned against doing violence against, or murdering each other. We read in Genesis 9:6 these words:

“Whoever sheds human blood, by human beings shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made humankind.

It is because we are made in the image of God that we are warned against slandering each other. We read in James 3:9-10 these words:

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.

When we gossip about another person, when we run someone down, we are treating what God says in valuable as worthless. And what God has given glory we are treating with disdain.

The Bible is a lamp unto our feet and a light to our path. It is not like the Encyclopedia Britannica which attempts to summarize all knowledge in one place. The Bible provides us with light so that we can see how to live in a multitude of different situations and through a multitude of questions as Spirit-led Christians, deeply meditating on the meaning of the words:

In the image of God, he created them, male and female he created them.

We see that it has implications for our understanding of the value of human beings at conception. These words push us to protest abortion. The phrase “image of God” forms guardrails against our attempts to create human beings for the sole purpose of supplying spare parts for those who already exist. Developing a Christian mind about the “image of God” give us pause about embryonic stem cell research. These words give us pause about different kinds of reproductive technology. These words challenge us regarding the way we are going to relate to the least of these – those with severe disabilities. These words challenge us regarding the way we relate to “the other” – immigrants, Muslims, people of other faiths.

As we deeply meditate upon the meaning of the “image of God,” we are challenged about the kinds of movies that we watch and get entertained by. Should we be exposing ourselves to movies that desensitize us to violence against human beings? When we deeply meditate upon the meaning of “the

image of God,” should we be exposing ourselves to sexual images that cause us to dehumanize a man or woman so that they become mere objects for our lust, even if the actor or actress wishes to be dehumanized. As we deeply meditate upon what it means that the “image of God” sexually differentiated as male and female, this provides some light for us regarding current discussion of gay rights.

Every single person who walks into that community center, whatever they look like, however they’re dressed, however demanding the person is, however obnoxious or needy or manipulative – every single person who walks into the community center is made in the image of God. And we remind ourselves of this. We are not made up of superior stuff because we may have resources or education or strategies for doing life better. We are committed to relate to people who come to the community center not as clients and ourselves as professionals. But rather, we are committed to relate to people as friends.

We have said over and over again about this community center that we in Vineyard Columbus want to be the best friends this city has ever had. And as Dan Franz from Fruit of the Vine Ministry has taught for many years:

We build a bridge of friendship and allow Jesus to walk across it.

That’s what we want.

Developing a Christian mind about work

The Bible is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. The opening chapters of the book of Genesis also help us to develop a Christian mind about work. We read in Genesis 2:15 these words:

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Now, remember that Genesis 2 is the story about paradise. God gives us this command about work to people when we were in paradise. I don’t know what your view of paradise is. Maybe it is you lying on a raft 50 yards offshore in the Caribbean and a good-looking man named Raul is swimming out to you with a drink with a little umbrella in it. The only decision you have to make during the day is should I roll over now because I seem to be getting too much sun on one side of my body. Sounds pretty good, doesn’t it? I would enjoy lying on a raft in the sun as much as anyone.

But God’s perspective of Paradise is not that we would spend eternity in glorious laziness rotating our bodies like a pork roast on a spit. God’s view of Paradise involves work. Yet, we have failed to develop a Christian mind about work.

Dorothy Sayers, who was a dear friend of my favorite Christian author, C.S. Lewis and who taught at Oxford in the 1940's, delivered a speech titled "Why Work?" Here is part of what she said,

In nothing has the Church so lost her hold on reality as in her failure to understand and respect the secular vocation. The Church has allowed work and religion to become separate departments, and is astonished to find that, as a result, the secular work of the world is turned to purely selfish and destructive ends, and that the greater part of the world's intelligent workers have become irreligious, or at least, uninterested in religion. But is it astonishing? How can anyone remain interested in religion which seems to have no concern with 9/10's of his life?

What I said earlier about different fields of university study can be applied as well to work.

Churches talk about prayer. They talk about prophecy. They talk about issues internal to the life of the church, but where most adults spend most of their waking hours from Monday to Friday, the world of work, churches haven't communicated to people how to think about the bulk of their lives. For many Christians, the bulk of their life, that is work, has been separated from God. Is it any wonder, then, that people sink into what could be called careerism. By careerism I mean the idolatry of your career, so that the way that you measure yourself is by your career. Your career becomes the center of life and you are willing to dismiss everything else, every other priority, to serve this idol of career.

Surely, there are some of you here for whom your career has become untouchable. You are willing to push your marriage aside; you are willing to push your children aside; you have become willing, maybe, to push your morals aside, aging relatives, everything else in life is allowed to be pushed to the margins so long as you serve career. The problem is your career has become divorced from God and you aren't thinking about work the way a Christian thinks about work.

We are not supposed to worship our jobs. We are supposed to worship Christ. Only when Christ gets back on the throne of your life and not your job will all the other parts of life start working.

There is also a sense by many folks in the church that I've talked with of meaninglessness in work. It is just a job. The only point of it is to draw a paycheck. The whole Christian mind about work has evaporated. Why do we work?

We read in Genesis 2:15 these words:

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

We are called to work and to take care of creation. God still wants human beings to improve the world. It is interesting because when we think about Paradise, we think, “what could be better than this?” We assume that God would put people in the Garden and say, “Don’t mess it up. Enjoy Paradise, but don’t break anything.” But God puts Adam and Eve in the middle of the Garden and says, “I want you to improve upon this already glorious world. I want you to develop it. I want you to make it better than it already is?” This improvement of the world is what theologians call the cultural mandate.

How can we do that? Plant roses over there. Figure out what tastes good and mix flavors together. Take the raw materials of the world and develop them towards their highest and best use.

Whenever people figure out a new way to do something, a new way to grow bigger strawberries, how to use less energy, how to make a musical instrument and then how to play it so that it sounds really good, how to make cotton into thread and then embroider a beautiful blanket – all legitimate work is part of this command to improve upon creation. Have you ever seen your work in the light of God’s Word? I am improving on creation by planting a tree, by fixing a leak, by playing a piano, by typing an email or building a house.

And all legitimate work is a way of serving other people. After church I usually go home and make myself a tuna fish sandwich and eat it along with some special pickles that I like, and sit and watch a football game. Do you have any idea how many people are at work so that I can eat a tuna fish sandwich with pickles and watch a football game?

Some fisherman had to go out in the Pacific to catch the tuna. They didn’t swim out there; they went on a boat which required a shipyard to build. People had to mine the ore so that the boat could be built. But the boat doesn’t run without oil, and so there needed to be geologists discovering oil, thousands of people drilling oil, pipelines built to ship the oil, refineries. Miners had to mine the ore for the can; canning companies had to make the cans. Railroad lines had to be established so that the tuna fish cans got to the store shelves. Logistics folks had to figure out the best way to move the cans from where the tuna is canned to store shelves. Electric companies had to provide lighting for the store. Insurance companies had to insure the store against fire and theft. Loan officers are processing loans so that all these businesses can be started. And I haven’t even touched on the mayonnaise, the pickles, or football game on TV. All legitimate work serves other people.

Let me speak to those of you who are choosing a career path. You are in college and are trying to figure out what major to major in. You are trying to figure out what career path to take. Maybe you are out of college and you are looking around for work. How do you decide on a career path?

So many folks, even Christians, because they haven't developed a Christian mind, settle on an occupation, or take a position purely because of its salary, its prestige, its benefits package. We need cash; we need health insurance; we enjoy the respect of others. Developing a Christian mind means that you begin to think about selecting an occupation based upon how well it enables you to contribute to society, to serve other people.

What if you tried to match your skills, your gifts, and your temperament with society's greatest needs? What if you asked, "will this job add something necessary, will it develop the world, will it be a blessing to others, will it be a net gain in the overall goodness in this world?"

Wouldn't it be better to begin to think biblically about our careers? Wouldn't we feel better about our lives if we began measuring our work by whether it is really serving another person, serving a purpose, rather than simply, "how well does the job pay? What are the stock options? How much vacation time do I get?"

In developing a Christian mind about work, we see that we human beings are made to be workers. We need to feel productive.

Let me speak to retirees and those of you who are thinking about retirement. As you develop a Christian mind, you will discover that retirement is an entirely unbiblical concept. I don't mean that you have to work for a paycheck forever, but as long as we are healthy, we have a contribution to make to the development of this world, to the service of others, to the promotion of the kingdom of God. There is a reason to stop working for a paycheck in order to free ourselves up for something that may be even more productive, to mentor, to coach, to develop young people, to have more time to pay more attention to those areas of life where we are most gifted and most useful. Retirement? Forget about it. I love Pastor John Piper's line,

Senior citizen discounts on airlines are for the purpose of short-term missions.

We all need to feel productive. We, all of us, because we are made in the image of God are created to be workers. This is part of what our community center is about. What we want to do in the community center is not give people handouts. We want to give people a hand up, an opportunity to develop their humanity by finding decent work that gives them an opportunity to make a contribution to others and gives them real dignity. That is why we are going to be doing job training. That is why we are going to teach English as a second language. That is why we are going to be offering GED classes. That is why we are tutoring kids.

The community center is not about a bunch of handouts. And just let me say parenthetically, we've gotten calls to our receptionists recently as people have

found out that we are opening a community center. Folks have been calling and saying, “Hey, I heard you are opening a community center. Can I have some money?”

One thing we will not be doing through our community center is handing out any money to anybody. That is not what this center is about. So don’t send your friends saying, “Hey, go to the community center, they will hand you some cash.” The community center will not. Your friend will be angry and you will be embarrassed.

The community center is about individuals in this church donating their time, their services, their talents so that people could know the joy of making a real contribution in this world.

Work is not only a way to develop creation and serve others, work is a way to develop yourself. Joan Chittister, who is a Roman Catholic Benedictine wrote in her fabulous book titled *Wisdom Distilled From The Daily* said,

Work develops the worker. The fact of the matter is that work is the one exercise in gift giving that always comes back to the giver. The more I work at anything the better I get at it. And the better I get at something, the better I feel about myself. It is the fear of doing good for nothing that destroys people, but skill in anything develops only with practice and practice. Everyone knows the difference between a good teacher and poor teacher, a good manager and a poor manager, a good telephone operator and a poor operator, a good reporter and a poor one, a good gardener and a poor one. And they all got that way by working with concentration, with commitment and, often, with long hours.

As we look at the beginning of the Bible, we find it speaks to our care for the environment.

Developing a Christian mind about the environment.

There was a fantastic show on TV the other night on PBS. You can watch it online at <http://www.pbs.org/moyers/moyersonamerica/green/>.

One Vineyard church, Vineyard Boise, is leading the way for how the evangelical church can be involved in caring for God’s earth.

We Christians find in our bibles that we are not only made in the image of God, we are not made to be workers for God, but that we are made from the dust of the ground. So we read these words in Genesis 2:7:

Then the LORD God formed a man [Adam] from the dust of the ground [Adama] and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Now this is one of those times that knowing a little bit of Hebrew is actually helpful because the Hebrew term for man is:

Man = Adam

And the Hebrew word for the ground is:

Ground = Adama

The *adam* comes from the *adama*. When you begin to meditate upon that then Genesis 2.7 becomes a lamp unto your feet and a light to your path. We see that there is a connection between us and the earth that we came from. There is a physical connection, there is a theological connection. This hints at the earth being our home in a way that goes way beyond what most evangelicals imagine.

The goal of life is not to escape the earth. We are made from the earth, for the earth. We are connected to the earth. What happens to us affects the earth. What happens to the earth affects us. We are eternally bound up with the earth.

Notice when God curses Adam, the man, because of Adam's sin, he doesn't just curse Adam, he curses the ground in Genesis 3:17:

To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

Our sin impacts the earth. Our greed ruins the world and causes environmental problems. Hosea 4:1-3 says:

Hear the word of the LORD, you Israelites, because the LORD has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. 2 There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. 3 Because of this the land dries up, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea are swept away.

We read in Isaiah 24:4-5:

The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the heavens languish with the earth. 5 The earth is defiled by its people; they

have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant.

We and creation are linked together physically, theologically. We are bound up in our environment. And when salvation comes, it just doesn't impact our souls. As the hymn "Joy to the World" puts it:

No more let sins and sorrow grow,  
Or thorns infest the ground  
He comes to make his blessings flow  
Far as the curse is found; far as the curse is found.  
Far as, far as the curse is found.

Creation and humanity's fate is bound up together. As we meditate on us being made from the dust of the ground, perhaps that corrects us from thinking too much of ourselves. The image of God pulls us upward towards valuing ourselves; perhaps being made from the dust of the earth pulls us downward towards humility. Maybe every time Adam heard his name, he heard God say, "He, Dust-boy, hey Dirt-bag." Maybe when he discovered that his body was made up of 60% water, he heard God say, "Hey, Mud-boy."

#### Another Solution: Recognizing Where We Are Going

As we Christians develop a Christian mind by allowing the light of the beginning of God's Word to shine on this world, as we Christians develop a Christian mind by allowing the light of the end of God's Word to shine on our paths, we recognize where we are going. The ultimate destination for us as followers of Jesus is not heaven. That is just an intermediate step. That is where we go before Jesus returns. But when Jesus returns, he is going to take those who have died and are attached to him by faith, back with him to a New Earth with a New Heaven. Here is what it says in Revelation 21:1-3,

#### SLIDE

*Rev 21:1 Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth,"<sup>1</sup> for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.  
<sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.*

It is this picture of a new earth; it is this city of God that pulls us forward in our work at the community center. We are not called to abandon this world. We want this world to move in the direction of that new Jerusalem. This world is not



just going to burn up. Sin will burn, but God's good creation and the good works we do to improve the world and improve the lives of others will remain. This is what fills us with inspiration. This is what fills us with hope. This is the picture of the New Jerusalem that gets us out of bed in the morning. It is what we are leaning into as a church.

Your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. As followers of Jesus we want to develop a Christian mind about all of life. Let's pray.

## **Developing A Christian Mind: Why All Of Life Matters**

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Rich Nathan  
October 14-15, 2006  
Psalm 119:105

### **I. The Need: Interpreting Life In The Light Of The Bible**

### **II. The Problem: Missing The Beginning And The End Of The Biblical Story**

- A. Life Boat Or Ark Theology? (Genesis 9:10, 12, 15, 17)
- B. The Message Of The Book Of Daniel (Deuteronomy 2:47, 5:18-23, 6:26)

### **III. The Solution: Going Back To The Beginning Of The Story**

- A. Developing A Christian Mind About People.
- B. Developing A Christian Mind About Work. (Genesis 2:15)
  - 1. Wrong Views Of Work
  - 2. Right Views Of Work
- C. Developing A Christian Mind About The Environment. (Genesis 2:7, 15)

### **IV. Another Solution: Recognizing Where We Are Going. (Revelation 21:1-3)**