

## **Foundations: In the Beginning...a New Responsibility Genesis 2:1-15 (AFBC 5.28.17)**

Last week, we turned to Genesis 1 and hear about God's work: creation. Today, we turn to Genesis 2 and consider a new responsibility that God assigned to us: namely that we, too, should work. Please follow along:

**2 Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. <sup>2</sup> By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. <sup>3</sup> Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.**

**<sup>4</sup> This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the LORD God made the earth and the heavens. <sup>5</sup> Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, <sup>6</sup> but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. <sup>7</sup> Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.**

**<sup>8</sup> Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. <sup>9</sup> The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.**

**<sup>10</sup> A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. <sup>11</sup> The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. <sup>12</sup> (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) <sup>13</sup> The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. <sup>14</sup> The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.**

**<sup>15</sup> The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.**

Last week, we began a journey through the first book in the Bible, Genesis, by congratulating our graduates as they embark upon a new day in their lives. Today, as we turn to the second chapter of Genesis, we consider a subject that hopefully will soon be of interest to our grads—and I'm talking now about work.

There's supposed to be a connection between the two—between completing degrees in school and going to work. Our first two children got this connection—the first becoming a teacher and the second a doctor.

Our third child, however, was more of a challenge! Katie studied math, biology, and environmental science in college. When asked, she would say her vocational goal was to be *an advocate for the environment!*

As her father, I had to break the news to her that people who are full-time advocates for the environment are usually married to someone who has a good-paying job! Well, though it took a while, she eventually found a way to prove me wrong—sort of.

Her job really does involve advocating for the environment, but she does this while working with corporations in this country (Walmart and Starbucks to name two) along with governments and farmers in distant places like Africa, South America, and Indonesia. She works to help them find ways to grow the crops that are in demand here by using agricultural methods that won't destroy our environment.

Now, that's good work in my book, and also in the Good Book. I say this because as I studied the text before us today, it occurred to me that what Katie does is not all that different from the task the Lord assigned to Adam. Listen again to the specific responsibility God gave him: **"The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to *work it and take care of it.*"** (It didn't belong to him. He was to be a good steward of it-- **Genesis 2:15**)

Some folks only want to focus on the "work it" part. Others only concern themselves with the "take care of it" part. But it's both. Our God-given assignment involves both! This morning, though, we're focusing on the responsibility that God gave us to work.

Granted, it's not everyone's favorite topic. You've heard the quip: "Work fascinates me. I can sit and watch it for hours!" Maybe some of us resemble that remark!

There's a Calvin and Hobbes comic strip where the Boss catches Calvin sitting at his desk staring out the window? The Boss says, "Why aren't you working Calvin?" And Calvin responds: "Because I didn't see you coming." At least he was honest.

Some of us should appreciate this story: Years ago, a man from the city stopped to observe a farmer plowing his field. A mule was hitched to the plow—just one--wearing blinders. The farmer was yelling, "Giddyap, Pete! Giddyap, Bill! Giddyap, Jeb!"

After watching the farmer carry on like this for a while, the man asked, "Say, mister—how many names does that mule have?" "Just one—his name is Pete." So he asked the farmer, "Then why do you call out Bill and Jeb?"

"That's simple," he said. "If Ol' Pete knew he was doing all this work by himself, I couldn't make him do it. But if he thinks he's got two other mules workin' alongside of him, he gets it done."

"What a great idea!" the man said. When he got back to his office in the city, he invented **the committee**. Now we call it a "team"-right? Have you been there and done that???

I. Believe it or not, the Bible says that work is GOOD! When God placed the man in the Garden, He gave him a job to do. He was to cultivate and care for the Garden—so we work by design. Work is a God-given function of human life.

Sometimes we remember just enough of the Genesis story to think that work is BAD—that it's the result of sin. So we think work is our punishment for rebelling against God. We remember the cursed ground, the thorns and thistles, and the sweat of the brow that we read about in Genesis chapter three.

But that's not God's idea of work. Sure, sin wreaks havoc in the workplace—just as it does in every other aspect of life. But Genesis makes it clear that productive labor was always in God's good plan for humankind.

He told Adam and Eve to tend the garden, to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it. So husbands and wives do the “fruity” part which leads to the multiplying part, which brings us to the filling the earth (or at least filling up the house) part, which means that somebody’ better do the SUBDUEING part, parents!

Okay... the point is: all of this takes work—and this is what God intends. In the beginning, before sin entered the world, when God first made us, He told us to do something. Work is one of God’s GOOD THINGS—one of His *foundational things!*

We’re not the first people, though, to struggle with this. The early Greeks, for example, thought that work was beneath the dignity of truly refined people. They thought hard work should be avoided if possible. Many people still hold to this view today!

The Hebrews, though, because they had the Old Testament Scriptures, they saw work differently. They saw work as a good part of life, and sternly admonished those who refused to work.

Listen to these passages from the book of Proverbs:

- 1) “Take a lesson from the ants, you lazy fellow. Learn from their ways and be wise.”
- 2) “A lazy fellow is a pain to his employers—like smoke in their eyes or vinegar that sets the teeth on edge.”
- 3) “A lazy fellow has trouble all through life.”

How true! The Bible tells us to work—to be good workers. The outstanding characters of the Bible were workers. 1) Before David became Israel’s king, he was a shepherd. 2) The disciples of Jesus were working men, fisherman and the like. 3) The Apostle Paul worked as a tentmaker. 4) And Jesus Himself was a “tehton” in the Greek—an artisan or craftsman, most likely a carpenter.

Someone observed that “The Lord who spoke of His yoke as easy was the good workman who knew the difference between a well-made and a badly-made yoke which the poor oxen at the plough would have to wear.”

Now, the New Testament doesn’t say much about Jesus as a carpenter. That work is overshadowed completely by His work as Messiah. But don’t overlook the fact that the Son of God spent His early life on this earth working in a carpenter’s shop.

Jesus worked! And He got this from His Daddy! Our Heavenly Father works, the Bible says. When God finished creating the world, He didn't just sit back and say "It's all yours now—do with it what you will." Sure, He took a day off, a Sabbath—we should too—but then He went right back to work.

The Bible teaches that God continues to work in His world to bring about its redemption. Sin messed it up. God keeps on working, though, to make it right again—lifting up the fallen, saving the lost, repairing what's been so horribly broken. That's God's work, and ours!

You remember when the Pharisees criticized Jesus for healing a paralyzed man on the Sabbath. Jesus set them straight by saying, "My Father is working still and I am working."

WE work because GOD works; and it's in His image that we're made. 1) To work is to enjoy fellowship with the God who works. 2) To work is to join with God in creation. 3) With the mental and physical abilities God has given us, we must be involved in some kind of productive labor to be fully human.

Whatever our work happens to be, if it's honest and productive, if it provides for ourselves and our families and others whom we choose to help, if it makes use of the gifts and abilities God has given us, then our work honors God and helps us lead fulfilling and productive lives.

II. So work is good—it is one of God's good gifts—and yet, it would be naïve to say that everything is good about it—because that's not true. There's plenty that's wrong with work.

There are "thorns and thistles"—as Genesis talks about--and not just when it comes to farming. Some of that "prickly" stuff exists in any workplace—because people like you and me are there.

In every aspect of life, including work, we have to decide if we are going to part of the problem or part of the solution—and sometimes we make bad choices, or act as if we don't care!

We hear about the rest of the world, where our greed often leads to deplorable conditions for workers in other countries—sweat shops and even forced labor. Should we as Christians be

concerned enough not to ignore what our appetite to consume is doing to others?

But then, there are also plenty of problems right here at home—under-employment, discrimination, jobs exported or increasingly replaced by robotics. Other people are overworked—by choice in some cases, but often because economic conditions demand it.

And then there're the children of poverty. With parents who are poor and unemployed, they grow up feeling that the world has no place for them. Often they remain locked in poverty for life. As Christians, shouldn't we be looking for ways to bring these children some hope? This, too, is part of our work and witness.

III. The thorns and thistles of Genesis are very real in the workplace today. Much is wrong. But that cannot be our final word. God's good intentions for work have been marred by sin, but the Gospel of Christ has something profound to say about the power of sin. Christ has broken the power of sin, and set us free from its bondage, free to be agents of change in this world.

So part of our mission—whether or not we acknowledge this—is to make the workplace better. God has given to us all time, talents and resources. We're responsible for whether we use these gifts to pursue good or evil. We can never separate what we do at work from what we profess to believe here.

Jesus told us to serve others. He even said that among His followers, the greatest of all would be the servant of all. His own life, of course, is the greatest example of this—whether sawing and hammering in Joseph's carpenter shop... or teaching, and healing, and dying for us all—Jesus... came to serve. And He told us that when we serve one another, we are serving Him.

This brings new meaning to the work God gave us to do back in Genesis—a new motivation for doing what we do. It's not just about making a living. Our work becomes an important part of making a truly good LIFE, and making a better world for ourselves and others.

Understanding work from God's perspective, and living as Jesus taught us, can remove the drudgery from work. We understand that work is a necessary part of life as God designed it, that we're

not fully alive without being productive in some way; and what we do combines with the labors of others for the good of everyone.

Years ago, a young man was struggling over what to do with his life. He went to visit an old boat captain, a friend of his family, to ask his advice. "Well, son, what are you good at?" the captain asked. "Everybody tells me I'm good at soaps and candles," said the young man.

"Okay, then do the best you can with soaps and candles. Be sure you take God into partnership with you. Remember to give Him a tenth of all you make, and keep Him central in everything you do."

Well, that advice stuck with this young man. His name was William Colgate—most of you are familiar with the Colgate brand. You've also heard of Colgate University which he endowed. He was also the very first President of the American Bible Society.

William Colgate went about his work in partnership with God. He was generous in supporting the cause of Christ in this world. He gave God the glory for all that he accomplished, and always sought to serve God through his life and his wealth.

Does what you believe about work, and what you advocate and support concerning the workplace, does what you do at work personally-- the way you go about your job--reflect what you believe about God?

It should—if we're followers of Christ, it should. This, too, is foundational to who we are as God's people: **"The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15).**