

Part 2: Good Labor

Tyler Velin | Genesis 2:4-15

August 10th, 2025

What do you think are the three most recognizable English words in the world? My wife and I recently heard someone share these words--and I spent some time confirming them. Words two and three aren't equally agreed upon. COVID has now become one of them, as well as the word, "OK." But the one word that is on everyone's list is: "Coke."

My guess is that most of us have tasted Coke--even more of us can recognize Coke's branding. In fact, if you look closely, remnants of it remain in this very building which was at one point a Coke bottling plant.

The world knows, loves, and is familiar with the sweet and distinct taste of Coke. But despite our familiarity--millions of people flock each year to Atlanta to visit the Coke factory and museum.

Why? We already know it well. We recognize it. We know it is good.

But I think there's an innate curiosity in us that isn't content simply to know something is good—but we want to know why it's good. I think Genesis 2 reveals why we have that longing—God made us that way. Last week Jonny pointed out for us the seven-fold repetition of God's creative work where he created the world and, "it was good," "it was good," it was very good."

But now, having given us the global perspective on God's creative work—Moses is going to slow us down, and give us a ground level, guided tour of the goodness of God's Garden. We know it's good—but now we want to see why it is good. In Genesis 2:4, Moses not only summarizes the creation account we just read, but he begins to change the focus of the camera from the broad lens which had previously tried to capture the greatness of the God who created: and now he's focusing on the goodness of the world God creation: **Genesis 2:4**, "These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens."

This slow walk through the goodness of God's comprehensive reality is helpful for us today for two reasons. First, it offers a definition of what we should be aiming for. Creation is no longer perfect, and while Genesis has yet to tell us what went wrong—here we see what is right. Knowing what's wrong is only half the problem—we must know what is right. Knowing what went wrong saves us from futility—but knowing what is right saves us from frustration.

This is the second benefit. This slow walk through the Garden paints God's perspective on the three most dominant topics of human life: labor, life, and love. How do we view work, what is the sum of our life, and what role does human love play? We know things are messed up in those areas. Because of that the world will constantly try and tell you what you need to fix—but God's account of those three areas should cut through the noise and guide our perspectives and our actions in life.

If we want to get back to "the good life" we've got to understand what the good life even is. Today, God's good life, his perfect creation, includes work. Our title this morning is, "Good Labor," and our big idea is this: **Work is good because God works for our good.** We will see this in three ways today: first we will see **How the World Works**, then we will see **How God Works**, and finally **How We Work**.

Having showed us God's comprehensive work to create the world, beginning in 2:5, Moses now steps back in time and slows down to show us more of God's creative ordering of the world. He begins saying this: **Genesis 2:5-6**, "When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground..."

Here is our first point this morning: **How the world works.**

We've seen something like this before, haven't we? If you have your Bible open and you look back at Genesis 1:1-2, we see the comprehensive statement of God's creation, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," and then we see a slowed down, frame by frame, account of what the process was like from some perspective in the middle of it, "Now the earth was formless and void and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters."

Last week, we read that God created everything in seven days, and now Moses picks up somewhere in the middle. The reason Moses often does this is to show us on one hand God's comprehensive power—he did it without any help from anyone. But he also wants to show us God's comprehensive wisdom—his powerful creation was not rushed, or shortsighted, but wise, meticulous and perfect.

And here Moses wants us to see that while God had created all the plants capable of producing fruit—he hadn't yet caused those trees to bear fruit. God's creation looked more like a plant nursery in the spring than the supermarket at harvest time. This isn't because God couldn't create mature plants.

In fact, it shows us the opposite—it tells us why there were not yet mature plants: There was no rain to water it and there was no man to work it.

Kids, have you ever seen an apple seed? It's small, kind of waxy, and soft enough you can maybe even squish it in your teeth. And yet God made that seed so perfectly that it has inside of it everything needed to grow into a tree so big and so tall that you can build a fort in it.

Nature grows because God created it to grow. Rain falls because moisture and condensation mingle due to a combination of surface and air temperatures which at some point become so humid and heavy that drops of water to fall. But rain does that because God made rain to do that.

The world works well, because God made a world that works well. And from the get go, God designed his world to grow into greater fruitfulness through the unique partnership of God's sovereign control and God's unique role given to man to cultivate it. While all the goodness and fruitfulness of the world is due finally to the God who created it—it's in the nature of the seed to grow, and it's in the nature of man to cultivate and care for the world God created.

The world was designed to work well, and therefore to be exceedingly good, because it is a combination of God's supernatural work to create and man's natural work to cultivate. The world works because God made it to. And we work because God made us to.

This should be a corrective to us in two ways. First, it should lead us to wonder and worship at God's work. When you turn on the faucet and a combination of gravity and suction causes water to come out—do you realize that it only does so because God made it to do just that? When you go on you

paddle board, and the surface tension of the water is sustained by the weight displacement of the surface of the board—do you see the wonder and beauty of a God who makes things work! And when you sit down to eat an apple, or a salad, or a steak, do you stand in awe of a God who by nothing but mere rain, and a little bit of man's elbow grease—gives us all good things to eat?

We should worship at how God works. But secondly—it should change how we view work. Generally speaking we view work through one of two lenses. We are either slaves to work or sloths to work. We either work thinking our work will satisfy us, or we work hoping to escape work altogether.

But work, and six days of work, was part of God's original design for humanity. Whether you're paid to do it or not, work is good. It's what we were made for. And here's how the Bible sustains the tension the world can't—Adam's work didn't earn him a Sabbath rest. God's command called Adam to a Sabbath rest. Therefore, our work doesn't earn us rest—so don't be a slave to it. But just as true, our work doesn't sustain our rest—don't be a sloth to it. God's rest leads us back into work—not further from it.

For the Christian, work is not the opposite of rest. They aren't competing realities; they are complimentary realities. We don't rest because we've finished anything. As long as we live God has called us to be working on something. But God invites us to rest because he has finished his work.

But that God who calls us into his rest is a good God. And we see that in our next point: **How God Works.**

Seeing that there was no rain and no man, God created man: **Genesis 2:7-9**, "then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

Why was there no mature fruit trees? Two reasons: no rain, and no man. So, what did God do? Two things: he created a mature man, and he created a mature garden.

God's character is so good that he always sets us up for success. There are two gracious gifts God gives here as it relates to our work—the first is our unique nature, the second is God's abundant nature.

First, regarding our nature, man's task to work the garden is tied to man's unique creation—God breathed into man his breath. You've often heard of the "protestant work ethic." Here we actually see the "human work instinct." We are made to work, and perfectly so. God's created world was fit for work, but so was Adam himself.

Remember, humanity was distinct from creation in several ways, but primarily because it was made in the image of God. And just how God showed his sovereign rule and control over the whole world—there's something unique about man's call to exercise in human ways, their control over the world. Our ability and desire to work to better things and to cultivate life is part of what it means to be made in God's image. Here we see the character of an abundantly helpful God—in hopes that we might be abundantly helpful children.

I remember when my son was young and he would come into my home office while I was writing sermons. He would take a little box he had, and an old keyboard, and he'd set it up in front of my bookshelf and he'd start "working" like his dad.

I actually have a picture of him doing this. And if I were to show all of you that picture--none of you would say: "Poor boy. Doesn't he realize he could be playing somewhere else?" Because what we see in moments like that with our kids are glimpses of the goodness we see in Genesis 2--that there is something profoundly natural, beautiful and wonderful when we heartily set ourselves to imitate our Father in our own little jobs.

There is a baseline fear in people over our jobs and AI. Which of our jobs will AI take over next. But notice here how humanity's capacity and call to work didn't have to do with our opposable thumbs, but with God's very breath inside of us. There is something about the nature of work which demands image bearers. Artificial intelligence cannot do all the work God designed, that is a role he reserved for image bearers. While AI might be smarter, faster, and cheaper than you—God made us to work, AI is just another tool we must use with wisdom—but AI cannot erase and should not erase our call to work as God's children.

But second, God's goodness is not only seen in our nature which works as he works—but look at the diverse and abundant nature God sets us to work in. Remember, God didn't send rain yet. He didn't put Adam in the garden with a rake and say, "Wait it out." God gave Adam a task—one which he was especially fit for—but then he created for Adam a mature garden—one which was especially fit for him.

Notice again the language in **Genesis 2:9**, God created "every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food." We see two trees which we will talk more of next week which speak of God's immaterial provision of life and wisdom—but here we are drawn to focus on the trees of God's physical provision.

God knew Adam's work required energy—so he gave him not one tree of utilitarian fruit—but every tree good for food. God didn't give Adam some gross powergel for the task—he desired and delighted to give Adam the foods of delight so he might enjoy his food and find fuel for his work.

But more than that, God knew Adam's work would be tedious, so he even gave him trees pleasant to the sight. Beautiful flowers which would remind him of the end of his labor, sweet smells to motivate him, deep shade to cool him. Who wouldn't want to work for a God like this, in a garden like this?

As training camp in the NFL begins, I often see quotes from players saying something like this: "I can't believe that I get to do this for a job. I get to wake up every day, and go out and play a sport that I love." It's easy to make that connection to a man who makes millions to play a game—but notice here how in God's perfect garden this was actually the reality! Work was work—but it was pleasant, good and satisfying work!

Our world today tries to avoid work and exhaustion. But we were made to work, and you were made to be exhausted. God gave us the night because he knows you need to sleep after working hard. He gave you good food because he knows you need to eat to refuel your energy.

Whether it is our children and chores, students and their studies, or life in the workplace—we were made to work and our view of work is a reflection on our view of God. Even in a broken world we can

still wake up each morning and say, “God has given me everything I need to do what he’s called me to do today.”

But, the question you’ve all been asking, what is this work? Does this mean we can’t ever retire? Does this mean we need to repeal child labor laws? Does this mean we are workaholics?

Well, the garden answers this too. And here we see our final point: **How We Work.**

This is introduced in a way that might seem odd to us in this text. In fact, it seems like an odd geographic aside. Moses seems to take a break from the garden, and just talks about rivers for a bit before he returns back to the garden. Look at this: **Genesis 2:10-14**, “A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.”

What is the point of all these rivers? Well, here’s where Bible study helps us a bit. You might think he’s trying to give us the location of Eden but what Moses is actually doing is defining the vocation of those who live in Eden.

Do you remember the two issues from verse 5? No rain, no man, therefore no fruit trees. God then created a man, a man who has a unique relationship to God—one who shares his very breath. Then God placed that man with a task inside the work it and in that garden he gave man everything he needed physically and spiritually. In the middle of the garden was the very source of man’s fellowship with God those two wonderful trees which represented and provided the union man and God had. The perfection of the garden flowed outward from the center of those trees.

But this garden God made wasn’t the whole world. It was one garden in the middle of the broader world—but from this intimate relational center of God and man, from this richly physical center of fruit and shade, flowed out four rivers to the ends of the earth.

God didn’t send rain on the whole world, he irrigated it out of Eden’s bounty. Wherever those rivers went, there was rich bounty. And only after Moses describes those life-giving rivers that come out of Eden does he conclude this section saying this: **Genesis 2:15**, “The Lord God took that man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to keep it.”

In other words, Adam’s work was to take all that God had given him in that garden and to expand it to the world. Everything he needed for the task was there, the fruit and fellowship in the garden and the rivers that flowed out of it. The physical nature of Adam’s work was twofold: babies and boundaries. Fill the garden with humans, and expand the boundaries of the garden.

But behind this physical reality was the relational reality of worship. For the Israelites reading this, those two words, “work and keep.” Would have been sirens in their heads. Sirens not of work—but of worship. Those two words were words Moses often used to describe the role of priests in the tabernacle. In Numbers Moses says it this way, **Numbers 3:7-8**, “They shall keep guard over him and over the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, as they minister at the tabernacle. They shall guard all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, and keep guard over the people of Israel as they minister at the tabernacle.”

Behind the physical nature of our work—is the relational nature of it. We work so that through our work we might enjoy fellowship with God and we might allow others—more and more others—to enjoy this garden fellowship with God.

But these verses about the tabernacle reveal the problem. They lost the garden. The tabernacle was a tent in a desert not a walk in paradise. Adam and Eve failed to keep the garden, they didn't guard it. It was infiltrated and everything fell apart.

But when man failed to work—God worked. It's what he does. He set up a pattern to meet with them even in the wilderness. When work became hard—God's grace worked harder.

We didn't work. Our work wasn't for God's glory, and neither was it for the benefit of others. And from then on out—it's often hard to see the goodness of work. Adam messed it up.

But that's why I love John's gospel. In John's gospel we see the work of Jesus, fully God and fully man, who obeyed and did all that Adam didn't do. He did the work in the desert that Adam couldn't do in the garden. And here's what I love the most, after Jesus was resurrected, here's how John introduces Jesus back into the scene: **John 20:11-18**, "But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?'" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"—and that he had said these things to her."

The greater Adam is the greater gardener. The one who gave his life is the garden keeper. The one who spilled his blood gives life through it to those who are still in the barren wasteland. His blood revitalizes our lives. His good work saves us and sends us back to work.

Did you see that? Where is Jesus when he speaks to Mary? They are in the garden where the tomb is. And where did Jesus send Mary? Out of the garden, back to work, a work of calling others back to him.

Paul makes it clear that if we don't work, we don't eat. But we don't just work to provide food for us—we work to provide the worship God deserves and to point others to the God who worked harder to save us than we could ever do to save ourselves.

Christians, of all people, should be the best workers because we have received the best work. We might not be in the garden yet, but we've got everything we need for good labor in the desert lands.

So, here's what I want to do briefly in closing—I want to give four points of application.

Application #1, Work is not just what we do it is how we live. You've got to work to eat—but the work we now have in Jesus is so much greater than 40 hours a week. Your day job doesn't free up the rest of

your week for “me” time. Your day job funds and fuels your job to glorify God, love others, serve the church and make disciples.

You need rest. God designed it to be so. But the pattern is six and one, not five and one, not four and one. That doesn’t mean you need to work for pay 40 hours a week or you’re the worst. But if we only view work as confined to what’s “on the clock” we will never be satisfied with work.

If your job only makes you work four days a week—what a privilege that you can have two extra days to work on your family, share the gospel with others, lead Bible studies, serve at Hope Rescue Mission, mow your neighbor’s lawn and so much more. Our work will never be joyful unless we see that there is joy in work.

Jesus, the great gardener commends us to such evangelistic works, **Matthew 5:14-16**, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

Application #2, all work is garden work. If Genesis 2 frames work in paradise, it also helps us see the worship of our work in the desert. Behind every job, whether it’s making dinner, mowing lawns, or doing the finances either cultivates God’s natural good—or it seeks to weed out and restore what sin has done in the world. After church today, I want you kids to see how your parents’ jobs are either working to build good things, or working to restore good things. When we realize this it allows us to worship in even what seems the most insignificant.

For as Colossians reminds us, “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.”

Application #3, Work is not only in the world, but in our hearts. It was going to take Adam work to pull out weeds in the garden, but this side of paradise, it’s also work to weed out our own hearts. This takes time and this takes energy. But God gives us what we need to do this good work. As Paul reminds us, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in us both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

Application #4, Christian work is the only work that satisfies us. It’s often easy to find your identity in your work—but the gospel saves us from this. It places our identity in Christ Jesus, and he calls us to meaningful and soul satisfying work. We don’t need to pine for the prestigious job, or the best pay, or anything like that the joy of work is it’s relationship to Jesus and nothing else.

For, good works are the end of God’s gospel work: **Ephesians 2:8-10**, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

Work is for our good because God works for our good—so let’s get to work.

