

## Our 'Garden of Eden' work placement    Genesis 2:4-9,15-17

It's been a quite a holiday weekend so far... the usual news of heavily congested roads to be avoided if possible and then there was the All Black's win against the Wallabies, their 18th straight game and tier 1 win in a row to attain a new world record! Now we have almost come through our weekend to the day of the year whose name is perhaps one of the greatest 'contradiction in terms' ever, what we call an oxymoron. According to the New Zealand History website 'Labour Day' commemorates the struggle for an eight-hour working day. New Zealand workers were among the first in the world to claim this right when, in 1840, the carpenter Samuel Parnell won an eight-hour day in Wellington. Labour Day was first celebrated in New Zealand on 28 October 1890, when several thousand trade union members and supporters attended parades in the main cities. Government employees were given the day off to attend the parades and many businesses closed for at least part of the day. It was to be the Liberal Party who made Labour Day a public holiday. The Labour Day Act of 1899 created a statutory public holiday on the second Wednesday in October, first celebrated in 1900. Now the holiday was 'Mondayised' in 1910, and since then it has been held on the fourth Monday in October which for us is tomorrow.

So, workers are honoured by a day in which *we do not work!* Which is like for instance a music awards show in which there is no music. The fact that workers are rewarded by giving them a day without labour, says something important about the way our culture views work.

Many people see work as a means to a better end, a necessity that pays the bills for the things we'd rather be doing. Have you heard of the phrase, "I owe, I owe so it's off to work I go". We separate work and the rest of life. But, is this how God sees work?

Often in the Protestant denominations of Western civilisation it is the Protestant work ethic that dominates the culture and our view of work. It is the work ethic originating from the Puritans, which states that hard work, discipline and frugality are a result of a person's adhering to the values espoused by the **Protestant** faith including Presbyterianism. Again, is this how God sees work?

According to the Bible, "The LORD God took the man and put him

in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Gen 2:15). "Put" translates a Hebrew word meaning "place, situate, settle down." This was intended to be his permanent station, not just his temporary location.

The word Eden meant "bliss, delight, pleasure" because Eden was literally a garden of pleasure. I can picture how life was in the Garden of Eden. Collecting food to eat, man and woman moving through the garden stopping once in a while to pick a strawberry here or a blueberry there for a treat, or pruning a few branches from the bushes and trees as they walked along. Maybe taking a swim in a lake fed by a small waterfall. Perhaps even playing 'hide and go seek' with a few of God's creatures who dwelt with them in the Garden. And then as evening came on, walking and talking with God as they made their way through the garden.

That would have been a pleasurable existence.

But there was work that had to be done. Genesis 2:15 says *"The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it."*

In other words, there was more to being in the garden than picking berries and playing with the creatures. Adam was placed in the Garden to WORK. To be productive. To do something worthwhile with his life. Adam was called by God to take care of something that was important to God.

So it was that God settled Adam in Eden "to work it and keep it."

"Work" translates a word meaning "to cultivate, labour, serve."

To "take care of" or as in the case of other bible versions who use the word "Keep" instead, which means "to watch, guard."

The grammar in this scripture verse makes it clear that this was to be man's ongoing lifestyle, not just an occasional activity.

Note that God's call to work came before the Fall. When woman was seduced by the serpent to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, who then gave it to the man who was quick to take a bite too so that sin entered the world and the bliss of Paradise was lost for humanity. However, God's call to work came before the Fall. In the perfect paradise of Eden, men and women were intended to work. This was not just what they did in the Garden—it was their purpose and lifestyle there.

From this fact we can conclude that God's perfect plan includes a

"garden of Eden" for each of us, an assignment we are to "work" and "keep." We have a calling that makes our lives relevant today and if it is relevant today, we can be assured that such a life's calling will be significant eternally. God wants to fill every moment of every day with purpose and fulfillment just as he did in the beginning with the first man and woman, Adam and Eve.

It was the same for God's Son. When you read the NT Gospel's there we see the one who calls us to follow him in obedience at work. When we view God at work through his Son Jesus the Gospels specifically point us to God's redemptive acts. The first question we should bring to the Gospels with regards to 'work' then is not, "What must I do?" but "What is God doing?" Gospels are theological biographies that tell the greatest news ever. John Calvin said, the Son of God has come in the flesh to "deliver a ruined world, and to restore men from death to life." By seeing God at work they can help us understand God's supernatural purposes behind natural events. Knowing, for example, that Jesus allowed a sick friend to die so that his friends might believe (John 11:15) can assure us that God is doing more than meets the eye. In order to be shaped by the Gospels we must not read them simply as moral lessons. And who will ever forget Jesus' famous last words on the cross, "It is finished." He came for work and finished it. With that thought in our minds, I want you to listen to Ephesians 2:10 *"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*

Now think about this:

1. God CREATED Adam in His own image. Ephesians 2 says that when we became Christians we became God's workmanship CREATED in Christ Jesus.
2. God PREPARED a 'something' for Adam to do. Ephesians 2 says that God has PREPARED in advance good works for you and I to do.

A preacher once wrote, "When I read Ephesians 2:10 I have this image in my mind. I visualize God preparing a secret garden just for me. It's a garden filled with all kinds of good things for me to do-I know that when I do those good things my life is productive. It has meaning. And I know I'm doing something that is important to God."

As God prepared the Garden just for Adam and Eve, each of us has a garden of good things designed JUST FOR US that gives

life meaning! This garden is designed specifically for you and me. God created these good works with you in mind – for your personality, your character, your particular strengths and weaknesses. And no one else can do those good works quite like you can because THIS garden was created just for you.

God owned the Garden of Eden. He even planted that garden for Adam. And then “the LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” (v.15)

God shared this Garden with Adam. He supplied the seeds to be planted. But ultimately God expected Adam to do the work and take care of that Garden.

In the same way – God has given you and I a garden of “good things” to do. He is sharing that with us. But He expects us to invest our resources in that garden which are our God given passions, time, talents, spiritual gifts and of course our treasure.

God will not be pleased if, instead of sowing the seed, all we do is sit in a seat or pew. Jesus promised us he was going on ahead to prepare a place for us. He told the thief on the cross, before he uttered his last words, “It is finished” that He’d meet him in Paradise. The word “paradise” in Persian means a walled garden used by a king. Isn’t that intriguing? Jesus has gone on to prepare a garden for us, a place in paradise. Meaning we not only have a garden here on earth, we have one waiting for us in heaven.

So, for you and I today as God’s gardeners and followers of Christ may you be challenged and even choose to see your work, your retirement, as your ministry in your garden here on earth. I include retirement because most people who I meet who retire say that they have never been so busy and well occupied with their time before. Think about it, the first person you see tomorrow, Labour Day, and then the day after that and the day after that is someone for whom Jesus Christ died. Your work is your service to your Father and your gift to his children, all of humanity.

Labour Day serves as a great day to remind you to make Jesus the Lord of every dimension of your life and ask his Holy Spirit to redeem every hour for God's glory and our good. Andrew Murray noted, "God is ready to assume full responsibility for the life wholly yielded to him." So the questions begs: Will yours be that life?

**We all have our own Garden of Eden work placement. What is yours? And are you going to work in it to the glory of God?**

**But you may ask - HOW TO [do I] WORK GOD'S WAY? 3 Keys**

**1. View your work as a call from God.**

The problem that we have is that we tend to compartmentalise our lives. We confine work to this little box. Family time goes in that box over there. God and religious stuff stay in the church building. This is why some folks act a certain way on Sunday mornings and then seem to leave God and everything they've learned and experienced behind on Monday morning. According to the Puritans, "All professions are spiritual to the Christian, not because of the nature of the work but because of the presence of God. When a Christian – the temple of the Holy Spirit – walks into a place of work, that place of work becomes a spiritual place." So you've got to tear down the wall and the perspective that keeps God away from your work. Begin to look at your work as your mission field. That doesn't mean that God expects you to preach to all your co-workers or pass out tracts or start up religious activities. You do however begin to ask yourself how you can do God's will where you work. So then, you should begin to view your workplace as a sacred space. God is just as present in your home, office, car, school, or shop as he is in this church building.

**2. Make your work your worship.**

*Work hard and cheerfully at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.* Colossians 3:23 (NLT)  
You can honor God through your specific job or retirement ministry. A significant and often overlooked way that we serve God is in our everyday tasks. Martin Luther understood this when he wrote, "The maid who sweeps her kitchen is doing the will of God just as much as the monk who prays—not because she may sing a Christian hymn as she sweeps but because God loves clean floors. The Christian shoemaker does his Christian duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship."

**3. Work with God**

The Follower of Christ has the advantage others do not have. You live with God. You work with God and therefore you are a recipient of the promises of God, such as Philippians 4:13, which says "I can do all things through Christ who gives me the strength."  
Let's pray now about our own Garden of Eden work placement...