

Life in the Garden

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Date: 25 August 2024

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[0 : 0 0] Oh, I love it. I love it. Thank you, Alex. Good morning, everybody. How y'all doing today? Good, good. Those of you who are new, thank you for being here. If you've been with us for a few Sundays and maybe towards the middle of summer even, you've been realizing we're in this topical series called Believable.

We're pushing pause on that today. I'm actually doing a standalone sermon, and that'll be out of Genesis 2. If you've got a Bible in hand, you can start turning there. If you've got a Bible on your phone, you can click to it. And if you don't, don't worry, we'll have the verses all up in the screen behind us.

And like I said, we are pushing pause. We're going to get back to our Believable series, you know, kind of answering and dealing with the tough questions, the things that may be confusing, or even like may bring misunderstandings for Christians of what it means to like both live in this world and follow Jesus at the same time.

Next week's topic you will not want to miss. Our very own Elliot Lytle here is going to be preaching on politics. Yeah, yeah. So why not just, you know, in the midst of all the mayhem, why not just throw that into the mix in a year like this?

So yeah, good luck, Elliot. Well, I'll be praying for you this week. All right, cool. Anyways, it's my privilege. I am so excited. I just want to say I'm so excited about this sermon.

[1 : 1 8] And actually, these particular set of verses, it's really been burning within me for some time now. And just so you know, I think I've overstudied on this one. And so there is such a thing as that.

And so I really had a hard time like honing in on what God is wanting to deliver to us through this passage today. I'm trusting that I heard his voice, but I'm going to read, we'll pray, and then we'll get into it.

All right. Genesis 2, and we're going to do verses 4 to 15. It says this, 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, 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. Then the Lord God formed a man of the 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.

[2 : 3 2] The tree of life was in the midst of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. 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 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.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. This is God's word. Pray with me.

Lord, we come to your word today. And I just want to submit very humbly that you would work from this text into our hearts in deep and profound ways.

[3 : 31] I just pray, Lord, that in our time together this week, where me and you have wrestled with this, and I hope everything that is on paper here is of you, and everything that is not, Lord, I pray that would just fall away.

Lord, work in our hearts today what you want to have us hear and know and understand as the truth that you call us to both know and to live in. Amen.

I love this because it is the beginning of all things. I love the first few chapters of Genesis. It is God setting everything up. It is the first things.

It is God setting in motion his good and perfect will, his good and perfect plan for creation before we got involved and mucked it up with sin, and God is on his redemption plan.

And so there's a lot to learn from this. And this is how man begins to fulfill his divine destiny. Remember in Genesis 1, God says, let's create man in our image and likeness, and he created them male and female in his images.

[4 : 34] Then he said, hey, here is our purpose for these image bearers of ours. We want them to go fill the earth and to multiply and subdue it, to bring it under submission.

And actually what is happening there and what God is inferring is that as men and women go forth as his image bearers in that ancient mindset, it was declaring to wherever they went that God was in control and in authority over whatever place they would tread and subdue.

And so God, that is the big plan. You think, man, that's an amazing, but we get to fill the earth. And we get to subdue it as his representatives. And how does he do it? Well, this is where I find it very interesting because God starts surprisingly small.

He makes a garden in this place called Eden on the east side of this place called Eden. And I believe there is a pattern that God is setting for us to realize and to follow.

The garden is a metaphor for how God intended for us to live. Now, I'm not suggesting that we need to go join the future farmers of America to figure this out, or I am also not demonizing industrialization.

[5 : 45] I'm just saying God could have done anything, and this is how he starts. So let's stop and let's consider what the garden means and why God chose to begin this way.

There's a lot to miss if we simply approach this text and read it through a modern Western mindset. But we have to remember that this was written to an ancient Middle Eastern people in their language and their imagery and what made sense to them.

And that Hebrew word for garden, it is meant to conjure up an image of an enclosed area, a bounded area, much more like the garden parks that were adjoined to ancient palaces of that day, or the bounded fields of ancient agrarian culture.

That's what they would have heard when they heard garden. The original audience, familiar with that time, would have heard one of those two things, and furthermore, they would have connected it, because this was written to the people of Israel, they would have connected it with their possession of the land of Canaan.

Joshua verse 18, 1 and 2 says this, So we see the battles were done.

[7 : 13] They were the victors, and the landlows subdued. Same word used from Genesis 1, fill the earth and subdue it. Same exact thing. But even though the landlows subdued, they said it wasn't finished, it wasn't enough.

It needed to be filled with God's people. It needed to be apportioned out, and that is exactly what they did. Verse 6, just a few verses later, Joshua says, You shall describe the land in seven divisions, and bring the description here to me, and I will cast lots for you here before the Lord.

What is going on here? For Israel to finish possessing the land, it had to be apportioned out by tribe, and then by family within that tribe. Then, not only was the land subdued, it was filled.

That was, and this filling, it was done by the casting of lots, which meant that the land allotment was being directly put into the hands of God. Man was taken out of it. And so, that is how every family of Israel received their bounded property.

It was an inheritance given to them directly from God. That is how they received it. These small bounded places are where they lived life, where they worked, where they sowed, where they harvested, and where they were meant to be satisfied in the good provision of God to them.

[8 : 32] It's shades of Eden. Israel took their land inheritance seriously. To move a boundary line was a serious crime.

You didn't do that. When a family had to sell their inheritance for any reason, maybe they fell on bad times, they needed help, right? Someone would come and purchase that.

And you know what? Every so often, they had this thing called the year of Jubilee. Guess what happened? The land went back to that family again. It had to be restored. See, what God began with Adam and Eve, he carried on through the nation of Israel.

Different location, same, similar pattern. Now, that is great for them. How does that translate to you and me today? Because God is not handing deeds out, right? In New Bern City for us to, like, go and take advantage of.

So, what does it look like to live in God's garden today? Or, let me say it this way. Can our life be lived in such a way that we can declare like David in Psalm 16, verse 6, when he says, The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places.

[9 : 40] Surely, I have a delightful inheritance. Well, do we have a delightful inheritance?

Has the boundary lines fallen for us in pleasant places? Well, there's the Sunday school answer to that. Of course, Jesus. He is our delightful inheritance. And yes, and amen to that. That is absolutely true.

But there is more to it than that that we can glean from this. It also means acknowledging there are laws of life that God has ordained for our flourishing. And one of these laws is being content with what you've been given.

Now, I'm not saying that we can't seek to better ourselves or better our condition. But I'm saying this. If you can't find contentment with what you've got, there is very little guarantee that you're going to find it with just a little bit more.

I used to think contentment comes down to just counting your blessings, right? Hey, if you stop and you just count your blessings, you're always going to be happy. And I want to say that is a helpful practice. I'm not against that at all. You should do that.

[10 : 43] But there's a deeper root to our discontentment that we need to acknowledge and reckon with. And let me remark on it this way by bringing up a statement I hear a lot these days.

I need to do what makes me happy, right? Like the cooler way to say that, I got to do me. And that's often code for I hate my job, I want out of my marriage, and I want to buy that expensive thing I can't really afford.

Now, there are legitimate moral and ethical reasons to change jobs or to leave a marriage. Think of an abusive spouse. But to just do that simply because we've gotten bored means we will carry a discontented heart into the next job, the next relationship, the next marriage, and the next luxury item we purchase.

And guess what? When we do it that way, it's just going to happen all over again. We're going to repeat it. The Apostle Paul can help us here. He told the Philippian saints that he learned, he learned the secret of contentment.

He learned how to be content in whatever situation he found himself, whether he was brought low, whether he was living in lack, or whether he was living in abundance. Well, man, Paul, that's interesting.

[12 : 03] How did you do it? Is it just becoming like a Buddhist where we are detached from caring about any material thing? Well, that can't be it because God wants us to enjoy this world he created.

And even Paul's statement says that he was content when he was living in abundance. He was enjoying whatever that abundance was. So, that's not it.

So, Paul, what's the secret? And I think he reveals it earlier in Philippians 1. Verse 21, it says, For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in this body, this will mean fruitful labor for me.

Yet, what shall I choose? I do not know. I am torn between the two. I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far, but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

I know that I will remain. I know that I will remain. I know that I will remain. I know that I will remain and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith.

[13 : 07] Paul's secret to contentment can be found in the way he has determined to live. This perspective, to die is to win.

And to live is to win. To die is to gain Christ, the very prize for which he is pressing on. To live is to continue to be poured out for your progress and your joy in the faith.

What Paul is saying is the same thing that Genesis 2 introduces us to. You find contentment when you find the right answer to this question, what are you living for?

What are you living for? And here is what it comes down to. You'll find contentment when you stop living for yourself. There are two ways to approach life, to be served or to serve.

Genesis 2.15 says that God put the man in that little garden to work it and to keep it. And most every theologian agrees that this garden was the prototype of the temple.

[14 : 16] And there's good reason for that. Renowned Hebrew scholar Bruce Waltke puts it this way, this garden represents territorial space in the created order where God invites human beings to enjoy bliss and harmony between themselves.

And God, one another, animals, and the land. God is uniquely present here. The Garden of Eden is a temple garden, represented later in the tabernacle.

And by that he means when you go and you read the tabernacle and the details that were in that, and then the Solomon's temple as well, you'll notice that there was embroidery in the tabernacle tent.

That was imagery, garden imagery. There was palms and blossoming fruits and flowers. And the same with Solomon's temple. You were meant to walk in there.

It wasn't just stone. It was overlaid with wood and etched into the walls. You were meant to feel like you were walking into a garden. Blossoming flowers and trees were all over the place, etched into those things.

[15 : 26] The Garden of Eden is a temple garden. This place where God was uniquely present. And so if this garden is a temple, then guess what Adam is?

Adam is the priest that serves in this temple. And ministers to it. And guards it. In order that it can be brought into its fullness for all that God designed it to be.

God put Adam into that garden to serve it. And in that work, in that work he would do, God would be glorified. The land would be blessed and fruitful.

And that dominion mandate that God gave to man would be realized. That's where we find contentment. You and me realizing, you know what?

First Peter talks about this. You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, royal priesthood. You have become a priest because of what Jesus has done.

[16 : 33] Which means this. As we step into our priestly roles, it is a call to serve faithfully in your God assignment. What does that mean, Jesse? What do you mean by God assignment?

Okay. If you're married, your spouse is in your garden assignment. If you have kids, they are in your garden assignment. Your workplace, your job, your co-workers, your customers, your vendors, they're a part of your garden assignment.

Your church, brothers and sisters in Christ, to the right of us and the left of us, in front of us, behind us, they are your garden assignment.

All of these, all of these plants in your garden are assigned to you to serve and care and watch over.

your priestly duty is to do that. But to do it in a way that helps bring them into their God-given potential. You're not doing it for God, you're working with God in this way.

[17 : 36] In our Genesis 2 passage, it said that no shrub or plant of the field had yet sprung up. And it's talking about an uncultivated ground, a ground that couldn't yield edible vegetation on its own.

It need to be farmed, it need to be cultivated, it need to be intentionally dealt with. It had all the potential for producing life-giving food, but it needed man's special attention.

Now, here's a Captain Obvious thought. One thing that means is that we have to be present. We got to show up. We can't check out.

God put Adam in that garden. Adam was a faithful presence in his God assignments. Are you a faithful present in your God assignment?

Are you a faithful presence in the garden that God has given you? Adam got in there and he got his hands dirty with that necessary cultivating work, planting and watering and pruning.

[18 : 38] Now, I want to say this, cultivation requires wisdom. In addition to attentiveness, you have to be aware of what each plant needs and where it is at because you need to water it when it needs water.

You can overwater something. Trust me, I've done it. You can underwater something. And it also means, as a cultivator, you prune when it needs pruning.

Because you can underprune as well as overprune. Now, think about that in terms of the human relationships and think about that in terms of discipleship.

Where might we be overwatering or underwatering? And what can we do that might be categorized as underpruning and overpruning? The Bible doesn't tell us how proficient Adam was as a gardener.

We just know he was. We don't know if he started off pretty terribly and then grew in wisdom or if God just gave him all the wisdom he needed all at once. But we know he was given an assignment big enough to matter, small enough to manage, and he carried it out.

[19 : 47] And I do know this. You and I, we are called to be gardeners and we aren't perfect. We aren't perfect in wisdom. We're not going to do this perfectly all the time, yet we must remain faithful to our assignment.

We got to press in. We got to show up. We got to be present. We got to carry out this call to cultivation. And as we do it, let's be teachable. And also let's be gracious.

And teachable, by teachable I mean let's realize we're not going to do it perfectly all the time. And when somebody comes and gives us good advice or when we need to receive correction and some wisdom so that we can cultivate things better, let's take it and say thank you very much.

I needed that. And then let's be gracious when we see others under watering or over pruning. Right? And they may need for us to step in and say something, but let's do it kindly.

Let's do it with some gentleness. Let's do it with some humility. And in all this cultivating, let's not lose sight that yes, the garden is a place that we are called to work, but it is also meant to be the source of our joy and satisfaction.

[21 : 01] Serve faithfully, but also make time to enjoy the fruit of your labor. In that first garden was every kind of tree that was good for food.

That's what we read. God gave Adam a ton of variety. Adam, he just didn't cultivate. He got to eat of the very fruits of the plants he was cultivating.

And serving faithfully, man, gives us the joy of coming along with God and helping bring things into their fullness as he's determined them to be. But we're meant to enjoy those things and be satisfied in the fruits of our labor.

That's a beautiful gift. gift. I just got to celebrate a really good friend of mine's 40th birthday. And some of his friends got to go on a road trip with him, not me.

I'm not bitter. It's okay. But there was a bunch of us, and we celebrated him, and we ate good food together, and we laughed together, and we reminisced and told stories, but we also had a time where we got to speak life and blessing over this good friend of ours.

[22 : 11] That is living and tasting and being satisfied in the fruitfulness of a relation cultivated over years and years and years and years.

I think of my own wife, Haley. We were going to be married 20 years next year, and I always sadly joke with her that I didn't know how to be a good husband until year 12, which is true.

Which shows something about her stubbornness. She is stubbornly patient, and I'm stubbornly selfish, I think. But when I started to understand what it means to be a husband, a priestly kind of Adam that was given something beautiful to cultivate and to bring her into her fullness, to serve her, and then I was going to stand before God one day and give an account for that, she began to flourish.

She began to be the most interesting person to me. She is one of my favorite people to spend time with. At the end of, at the end of my work day, I look forward to getting home and sitting down with her and hearing what's going on and seeing the things that she's wrestling with and hearing what God is doing in her life.

And that's vice versa. And again, what is that? That is enjoying the fruit of the garden God has given me.

[23 : 40] Cultivating that. Now compare that to the idea of having Facebook friends. Very casual acquaintances. Compare that to the, having a casual affair without any depth.

It's getting all the benefits without the work, but it's so shallow. It is so meaningless. There should be a diligence and contentment in our cultivating work.

Yes and amen to that, but I want to add this too. There needs to be regular pause times where we actually enjoy and celebrate the relationships we've been given. I talked about that.

How we can do that. And that includes spending time with one of the most important relationships we have. Spending time with God. Adam and Eve did God's priestly work and God's assigned place, but there came a time in the day where they got to push pause and God's presence would come.

If you often feel like you need more hours in a day and more days in a week, there's just never enough time, that might be evidence that you are living outside of healthy limits.

[24 : 51] That might be evidence that you have moved your boundary line to a place that is unsustainable. If you can't find regular time to pull away from work, to pause from work, to enjoy God and to enjoy the fruits of the garden that He has placed you in, there may just be some discontent in your heart that you need to deal with.

God doesn't need you to be greater than you are. God doesn't need you to be richer than you are. He wants you to be faithful. Faithful to live in His boundary lines.

because He loves you, He knows what's best for you, and here's the thing, He loves to spend time with you. In one sense, don't be driven by greed or malcontent or selfish ambition, but in a spiritual sense, don't be so committed to the Great Commission that you forsake the Great Commandment.

It's kind of what we need to watch out for. regular communion with God keeps us from forgetting that He is the life, He is the source of abundant life.

Regular communion with Him reminds us where the true rewards of life are. Jesus knew this, which is why He would pause on ministry to press into communion with the Father.

[26 : 13] We get a tiny glimpse into the kind of communion that Adam and Eve had with God. It says that the presence of God came in the evening wind, came near the end of the day like a breeze in the evening.

Isn't a cool breeze on a hot day so delightful and refreshing? That's what taking time to commune with God is like. It's like a cool breeze interrupting the steady heat of life.

And those breezy moments, they're amazing, but they aren't constant. And even though they're not constant, it doesn't mean God is only with us when we pause and we rest. And here is how we know.

A river ran through the garden. Genesis 2.10, a river flowed out of? A river flow out of?

All right, cool. Just to make sure we're still tracking. Eden. It flowed out of Eden to water the garden. And then it divided and became four rivers.

[27 : 18] Remember, Eden wasn't the garden. The garden was a place within Eden. Well, what does that mean? John Walton's commentary makes this very illuminating point.

Technically speaking, the garden should be understood as adjoining Eden or connected to Eden because the water flows from Eden and waters the garden.

In the same way, therefore, that a garden of a palace adjoins the palace, Eden is the source of the waters and it's the residence of God.

And the garden adjoins God's residence. The picture presented is of a mighty spring that gushes out from Eden, gushes out from the place of God's presence, God's residence, and is channeled through the garden for irrigation purposes.

Eden's location is not given so that it can be found, but so that its strategic role can be appreciated. All fertility emanates from the presence of God.

[28 : 27] All life, all fertility emanates from the presence of God. Now, you can read the river running through the garden and see it completely and utterly in a utilitarian manner.

Plants need water. River equals water. Adam gets water from the river, uses it for irrigation. Plants grow. And that, that wouldn't be incorrect, but to limit it to that misses the greater truth that God is trying to get across to us here.

To live in the garden, to live within that place, is to be adjoined to God's dwelling place, which also means living with the unceasing benefit of his life-giving water.

And that is the benefit of your garden being connected to Eden. But therein lies the problem. Is our garden connected to Eden?

Because Adam and Eve sinned, and they were cast out of the garden, and that garden temple that was adjoined to Eden was lost. They couldn't get back in.

[29 : 30] Now we see later on God providing lesser garden temples in the form of the tabernacle and later on the Jerusalem temple. But that was a temporary fix. He had something better in mind, and that better plan was to turn people like you and me into his garden temple.

Let that sink in. His better plan was to turn people like you and me into his garden temple. The garden is a helpful metaphor to teach us how to live well and flourish, but it is also something else.

The garden explains what you were meant to be. See, through faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior, we are joined to God once again. We are the place where God has chosen for his presence to dwell where heaven and earth meet.

We are connected to the abundant life of Eden once again like that first garden was, and out of God's new garden temple, you and me, flows a different kind of river.

John picks up on this in chapter 7 of his gospel in verse 38. Whoever believes in me, Jesus is saying, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.

[30 : 43] Now this he said about the spirit whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the spirit had not been given because Jesus had not been glorified. Jesus is saying, hey, something is going to happen.

I am going to be glorified, and when that happens, there is a totally new dispensation that is going to be at work. You are going to become the very dwelling place.

You become the garden of God where his spirit is going to dwell, and from that place is going to usher rivers of living water. You are going to be the new garden temple.

Not only that, you're going to be the new garden temple in which the second and better Adam dwells, the person of Jesus Christ himself. You are the inheritance that God gave to Jesus whom he died for and he delights in.

You are the new garden temple that bears fruit and grows into the fullness of God's perfect purpose. It says you are his workmanship. You are the new garden temple in which the living waters of the Holy Spirit gush forth from.

[31 : 50] You know, it's interesting. It said, it says in that Genesis account, one river flowed into Eden, but it came out as four. That is the multiplying power of abundant life, of God's life that flows through us.

It multiplies out through us. It goes in many directions. It can affect many people. This should change how we see ourselves. This should change how we understand life and what we are meant to live for.

And it should also change how we see others. To be a garden temple is to be a sacred and holy thing. It is to be a fruitful place. And it is also incumbent upon us not to see ourselves that way only, but also to see others in that same way.

Which means that we go around treating everyone with honor and dignity and the hope that maybe God is going to call them and save them and turn them into his temple garden.

And so, we look down upon no one, but we make an appeal to all. Come, believe, come, be reconciled to Christ, become his garden temple.

[32 : 59] As the band comes up and we respond, this is my appeal to you. If you're here in the room and you're not yet a follower of Jesus, faith in Jesus is the only way to be reconciled to Jesus.

And that takes belief and that takes trust and that takes surrender. We have to believe that what Jesus said about himself is true. He said he was the son of God who came down from heaven to live a perfect life, a sinless life, but to die the death of the sinner for the sinner in our place, to be buried and to rise again, to defeat death for us.

And then he calls us to not only believe in that, but to trust that that is true, to trust in all that he says is true, to believe on him and to surrender to him as both Lord and Savior. In a moment, there's going to be an opportunity to respond.

There's going to be a prayer you can pray and I ask that, man, don't get out of this room without doing that. Lord, Jesus is calling you to himself today. Now, if you're already a follower of Jesus, we're going to take communion and communion reminds us of what it took to be reconciled and united to God once again.

On the night that Jesus was betrayed, he was in a garden, agonizing over his impending death. He was put to death on a cross and then he was buried in a tomb in a garden.

[34 : 31] Jesus endured the garden as suffering and death and overcame them both so that we can experience the garden again as abundant life with him and through him so we can be his holy and faithful servants.

Let's consider our own hearts before we come and we take communion which reminds us of those things. How is God calling you to respond? What is a good next step for you to take?

Is it a time to recommit? Is it a time to confess to him and repent? Is it a time to just express some gratitude and wonder at this amazing God who does amazing things with his people?

Whatever your response is, take some moments, do some business with God, spend time with God and when you're ready come to the table, take it back and take it when you're ready.

Let me pray for us and pray for this moment. Lord, bless this moment. We are here, we are in your presence, your life-giving presence and I pray that you would bring life.

[35 : 44] And let this be a moment like an evening breeze where we feel just your joy and your delights. May it be a moment where we may be drinking from living water for the first time in a long time, our souls being parched, our land being parched and so desperately needing it.

Or maybe we're just drinking it all in and rejoicing. Whatever it may be, draw near to us. We thank you, Lord.

Amen. Amen. Amen.