

3.9.25 The Garden of Creation Genesis 2.4-10, 15-25 (verses 8-10, 15,16)

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This has been a full, rich, and rewarding week for me. Jill and I had the blessing of being in Florida this week with 24 pastors and many of their spouses from Monday through Thursday. It was encouraging to hear and learn what God is doing in ABC churches from California to New York and New England who are serving and blessing their communities and reaching people for Christ. Several of them are coping with challenging circumstances, such as armed Nazi protestors showing up in their town and those pastors need our prayers for wisdom and courage. Friday night and Saturday we enjoyed the Thrive Cape Cod Conference, and I want to thank every one of you who took the time to attend the worship service on Friday evening or the breakout sessions on Saturday or both. Representatives from more than 40 churches and ministries participated in our conference which is a beautiful expression of Christian unity and harmony. The diversity of churches and ministries is like the variety of flowers and plants you might see in a lovely garden; they aren't all the same and the differences add to the beauty of the whole.

Today we're beginning a new series in worship called **The Gardens of God**. The Bible is rich with imagery and symbolism, and gardens play a significant role in its narrative, reflecting themes of creation, love, betrayal, and redemption. Among the pivotal gardens mentioned in the Bible are the Garden of Eden, the Garden of Love in Song of Solomon, the Garden of Gethsemane, and the Garden of God in Revelation. For the next eight weeks we're going to be spending time in the Gardens of God starting with the first garden in the Bible, the Garden of Creation, or the Garden of Eden.

The Garden of Eden, described in Genesis 2, is the first and arguably the most iconic garden in the Bible. It was a place of beauty, created by God as a dwelling place for God and humanity. The garden was filled with trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food, including the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:8-9). This garden symbolized a perfect relationship between God and

humanity, where Adam and Eve lived in harmony with nature and with each other, free from sin and shame (Genesis 2:25). Listen to **Genesis 2:15-25**,

¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden **to till it and keep it.**

¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, *“You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”*

¹⁸ Then the Lord God said, *“**It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.**”* ¹⁹ So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found **a helper as his partner.** ²¹ So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²² And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ Then the man said, *“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.”* ²⁴ Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. ²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.”

Today, we embark on a journey back to the beginning of time when the **Creator creates creation**. Creation is not random or accidental. God calls the world into being to be God’s faithful world. In the coming weeks we’ll see whether people will be faithful or not in response to the call of God and the demands that come with the gift of life in God’s creation. In the opening chapters of Genesis, we’re introduced to the first garden where the Creator’s work was seen in its purest form. Genesis 2:4-25 offer a profound vision of God’s intention for humanity, the earth, and our relationship with God and one another. Walter Brueggemann wrote, *“The destiny of the human creation is to live in God’s world, with God’s other creatures, on **God’s terms.**”* The Garden of Eden was more than a place; it was a declaration of God’s love, God’s purpose for creation, and desire for communion with humankind. Today we’ll explore the Garden of Creation,

reflecting on its significance for us and how its lessons about work, rest, relationship, and stewardship still resonate with us.

I. The Garden: A Place of Origin and Purpose (Genesis 2:4-10)

Genesis 2:4-6 takes us to a moment before the lush vegetation of the earth was fully realized, before humanity had even been created. God created the world with order and intentionality. The garden was a work-in-progress, like gardens you may have worked on yourself, awaiting the completion of God's plan. There was an element of waiting, a divine pause before the fullness of creation was completed.

In the ancient world, gardens were places of life, provision, and beauty. The Garden of Eden was no different. It wasn't simply a garden for enjoyment; it was a garden with purpose. It had a mission to accomplish, to serve as the cradle of humanity's existence and relationship with God. The beauty of Eden wasn't just in its appearance but in the relationship it symbolized—the relationship between Creator and creation. The word "Eden" means "delight," and this place was the symbol of God's perfect creation, full of peace, beauty, and order. But more than that, it was meant to be the foundation for humanity's relationship with God.

II. Work and Rest in the Garden (Genesis 2:15)

In the garden, Adam was given a charge. Verse 15 says, "*The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden **to till it and keep it.***" Notice the two responsibilities given to Adam: **to work and to care for the garden.** Work is part of God's original design for humanity. This is significant because people can view work as a burden or a curse, but from the beginning, work was a part of God's good plan. It was not meant to be oppressive but rather a purposeful and fulfilling task. It was partnering with God. Adam's work was not just about survival, but about cultivating, creating, and bringing beauty into the world in harmony with God's plan.

There's also a divine rhythm established here—work and rest, both of which require attention to the earth, to life, and to the Creator. Reading Genesis 2, we have a strong Biblical mandate to do all we can to care for God's creation. It was part of humanity's

primary responsibility from the beginning, and we haven't done it well to this day. While the garden was incredible, it still required cultivation. There was no mindless idleness; even in paradise, work was essential for maintaining the goodness of creation.

But alongside work, there was also a gift of rest. Genesis 2:2-3, which precedes our passage, reveals that God Himself rested on the seventh day after creating the world. God's rest wasn't a sign of fatigue but a completion of His work. This rest invites humanity to follow the rhythm of creation—to enjoy and reflect upon the goodness of God's work. In the garden, both work and rest were in harmony, each giving meaning to the other. That's why keeping and maintaining a sabbath is part of the Ten Commandments and such an important habit for us as well. Work and rest are part of the rhythm of life God designed. Margaret Renkl, in her book, *The Comfort of Crows: A Backyard Year*, writes, “*The natural world has never needed us more than it needs us now, but we can't be of much use to it if we remain in a perpetual state of exhaustion and despair.*”

III. The Gift of Relationship (Genesis 2:18-25)

In Genesis 2:18-25. God looks at Adam and recognizes that it's not good for him to be alone, so God creates a helper suitable for him. This is where God's creative genius shines—He forms Eve from Adam's rib, establishing a partnership that's built on unity and mutual purpose. In this act of creation, God sets the foundation for human relationships. The relationship between Adam and Eve is rooted in mutuality, equality, and cooperation. This is a foundational truth: relationships are not meant to be hierarchical or dominated by one over the other but built on shared purpose and partnership. God wisely provides Adam with an equal yet different companion to help him fulfill the mission in the garden.

The relationship between man and woman points to a deeper relationship between humanity and God. Just as Eve was created to be a partner for Adam, we, as human beings, are designed to have a reciprocal relationship with our Creator. We're not meant to be self-sufficient; we're created to exist in relationship, first with God, and then with each other.

Verse 24 expresses this beautifully: *"That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh."* This verse is a foundational teaching on the nature of marriage which is to be a bond of unity, love, faithfulness, and shared life. It reflects God's intention for human relationships to be characterized by deep unity and companionship. The first human relationship in the Garden was a mirror of the intimate relationship that all of us are invited to have with God. It's not good for us to be alone, whether we're married or single, widowed or divorced, we all need human relationships, connection, and community as well as communion with God.

IV. The Garden as a Picture of God's Kingdom

The Garden of Creation is a picture of God's Kingdom. In Eden, we see the way God intended the world to be—a place of harmony, peace, beauty, love, and purpose. It's a glimpse of what will one day be fully realized in the New Heaven and New Earth. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He instructed them to pray, *"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."* (Matthew 6:10). The Garden was a picture of this kingdom—a place where God's will could be accomplished.

Even though the world today is far from the perfection of Eden due to sin, the message of the Garden is still alive in the gospel. Through Christ, we're invited to experience reconciliation with God, restoration of our relationships, and a taste of the beauty of the Garden even in a broken world. The Garden was only the beginning of God's redemptive plan, and through Jesus, we're brought back to the possibility of flourishing with God and each other.

V. Lessons for Today: Work, Rest, Relationships, and Stewardship

As we reflect on the Garden of Creation, we're reminded of four key truths that apply to our lives today:

1. **The Value of Work:** Work is not a punishment but a part of God's good design. It's an avenue for creativity, contribution, and fulfillment. We're called to steward the world around us, bringing God's order and beauty to bear in every task we undertake.

2. **The Importance of Rest:** Rest is not optional in God's economy. Rest is necessary for our well-being and a reminder that the world does not depend solely on our efforts. We're invited to rest in God's completed work and to trust in God's provision. The practice of sabbath helps to free us from the ruthlessness of work, hurry, and busyness that can infect our lives.
3. **The Power of Relationship:** The creation of Eve shows us that humanity is made for relationship—both with God and with one another. Our relationships should reflect mutual respect, love, and partnership, just as Adam and Eve's relationship was a partnership in the garden.
4. **Stewardship of the Earth:** We're entrusted with the care of God's creation. Like Adam, we're called to tend to the earth, cultivating it and using its resources wisely. This calls us to responsible environmental stewardship, recognizing the sacredness of the earth God made.

Conclusion:

The Garden of Creation is a picture of God's vision for the world. As we reflect on Genesis 2, let's remember the beauty and goodness of God's creation, our purpose within it, and our relationship with the Creator. Let's strive to live in harmony with God's will, working, resting, and loving as He intended. And may we look forward to the day when, in the New Heaven and New Earth, the perfect Garden will be restored, and we will live in perfect communion with God forever.

Prayer:

Divine Creator, we thank You for the Garden of Creation, for the beauty of the world You made, and for Your original design for humanity. Help us to live in harmony with Your will, to work and rest as You intended, and to build relationships that reflect Your love. Teach us to be good stewards of the earth and to live in anticipation of the day when Your Kingdom will come in its fullness. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. How does the description of humanity's creation in Genesis 2 shape your understanding of what it means to be human?
2. Why do you think God chose to create humans in such an intimate way (forming from dust and breathing life)?
3. What does Adam's role in naming the animals teach us about our responsibility toward creation?
4. How does the creation of Eve emphasize the importance of human relationships?
5. Why do you think God placed a restriction on eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? What does this tell us about obedience?
6. In what ways does our culture challenge the idea of living under God's authority? How can we respond faithfully?
7. How can we better live out our purpose as stewards of creation in our daily lives?

Genesis 2:8-10

⁸ And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹ Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰ A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches.