

With God in the Garden

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[0:00] Heavenly Father, we do thank you and praise you for your word and thank you that it speaks! It speaks into our lives and we pray for that to happen this morning Lord that we! learn more about you and be encouraged in our relationship with you. In Jesus name. Amen.

Amen. So as we've been told we're continuing to think about God and creation with particular focus on the garden of Eden. Eden in Hebrew means pleasure or delight. The garden was to be a place of delight for the first humans that we're also introduced to, Adam and Eve. They were to be with God in this garden of delight which can be described as a paradise. Now I wonder how many gardeners we have here this morning. I have to say I am not a gardener. It's not my gift. It's good to know your gifts and it's good to know what is not your gifting. You would be able to work this out if you saw our garden.

It would not be compared to the garden of Eden. It's more of a disaster area than a paradise. And I was reflecting on this. I found it rather amusing that I got the passage about the garden when I am no good at gardening. My parents when I was growing up were not really into gardening so I guess I followed suit. My mum was a great cook, always baking and cooking. My father was very busy with the family business and in later life they had a patio with just pots and vines and trailing plants which they enjoyed caring for but that was about it. I've always personally found gardening a bit of a chore really rather than a delight. I quite enjoy weeding but it's not something I would choose to do to relax. I can remember when I was a vicar in Whirl we had a lovely vicarage in a nice area with lovely neighbours who all clearly loved gardening except for the single man that lived next door who had tarmacked all his front and we thought what a great idea. We weren't allowed to do that. We obviously got chatting with the neighbours and sometimes they would ask about our garden which Jeff and I it made us quite laugh. We weren't going to succumb to neighbourly pressure about gardening. We had two young children. I was working full-time gardening. I remember one sunny day Pat who lived opposite whose garden was immaculate said oh hi Emma are you gardening this weekend? I mean where else in the world but England would people ask if you're going to be gardening? But anyway how are you going to be gardening? And I could see the longing in her eyes. No sorry Pat not this weekend. I do have a to-do list but gardening isn't on it and she looked at me as if to say oh how did the diocese appoint you as a vicar when you can't garden? And the problem also is I don't seem to be able to make anything grow.

I was thinking about this recently as a friend bought me some lovely sunflowers and they look lovely. I thought they looked lovely in the lounge but not long after I put them out my son my 19 year old son walked in and said cool what's that funny smell? Oh what is it? It's really odd.

Not imitating him very well but don't you just love the sort of teenagers grunt. I'm sure you can remember your children if you have them doing the same. And we tracked the smell down to the sunflowers.

[4:24] They really did smell appallingly and according to my son they had to go straight away. They were past their sell-by date. My children are obsessed with sell-by dates. I don't know what that's about.

But we can rest assured that there were no bad smelling flowers in the garden of Eden. Everything smelled beautiful. It really was a place of delight for our first two humans Adam and Eve to be and for them to be with God. Adam was placed there first to work and take care of it and then Eve was introduced to be his companion. In his book called *The Gospel and the Kingdom* Graham Goldworthy says the creation of man in the image of God. Man is not the end of a chain of evolution for he is qualitatively distinct from the animals. Man was created in fellowship with God and with dominion over the rest of the created order.

Thus there is a unique relationship between God and man. The Lord is good and establishes his man in a relationship which brings both rule and blessing. God is king. Man is his subject. And the place where all this happens is the very best place of all. It is the garden of paradise called Eden. So we're told that man was created to be in fellowship with God. So how is your fellowship with God?

Are you spending time with God each day, each week, each month? Adam and Eve spent time with God in the garden. Where do you spend your time with God? It may be in your garden. Perhaps it's in another part of God's creation because there's something about being outside in God's creation that really does help us, I think, to focus on him. Perhaps you go to a park or the woods or perhaps it's walking near your home.

[6:55] Or it was lovely to hear Lou say earlier that she had that particular bench church and that she goes walking. And I'm sure that really helps her to focus on God. Perhaps it's walking near your home.

I wonder how your fellowship with God is and where that takes place. Or perhaps you don't spend time with God on your own.

Increasingly, Bible-believing, church-going Christians don't spend much time, if any, with God on their own. And if that's you, I want to encourage you and challenge you to find some time each day to spend time with God.

Ideally outside in his creation or it may be just sitting on your sofa in your living room. I would say that in order to grow in our faith and in our relationship with God, we do need to get with him on our own. And I would like to encourage you to make use of the prayer room that's available for the 24-7 prayer. It may seem like you're just signing up to do what you normally do, but actually there's something very powerful and something very different can happen, as Anne shared with us last week. Actually, it's just hard to explain, but I would really encourage you to sign up and you really will not regret it and you'll really benefit from it.

Let's just have a moment of quiet now and each of us think, how am I going to make time this week to be with God? I now want us to think about Eve, who we're introduced to in the garden.

[9:00] We're told in Genesis 2 verse 18, as John read for us, it is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him.

So we learn that God created a woman from one of the ribs of the man. Later on in Genesis, in chapter 3, we read that Adam and Eve would go on to sin, starting with the serpent deceiving the woman and then the man choosing to sin also.

So sin comes into the world through the man and the woman choosing to reject God's way. They disobeyed God's plans in favour of their own plans.

And that is often what Eve is known for. But what else can we learn about her? Well, firstly, Eve was a helper.

The Lord himself said, as we heard earlier, that Adam needed a helper. All the animals had someone corresponding to them, but Adam had no one.

[10:08] So God created the woman. And the Hebrew word used for helper is ezer, which means someone who renders aid. Sometimes it's easy to think that because Eve was a helper, that she was inferior to Adam, but that's not the case at all.

Although God clearly has a design for the relationship between a husband and a wife, the fact that Eve was created to be a helper doesn't mean that she's weaker or inferior to him.

Helpers are, of course, there because others need help. It was not good for Adam to be alone. He needed someone to help him. And that same word, ezer, is often used to refer to God himself as the helper for his people.

And we certainly know that God is not weak or inferior. He's the greatest, strongest, and most powerful helper of all.

In her book, *The Calling of Eve*, Jackie King says, So when Eve was helping Adam, she came alongside him to work with him and strengthen him and support him.

[11:42] She served a similar function that God serves when he helps us. When we help each other in the church, helping those who are hurting or in need, we are helping as God does, the great helper to all his people.

Let's again pause for a moment and consider where God might be calling each of us to help in our church family. Who is he calling us to help at this time?

So Eve was a helper. And Eve disobeyed God, as I mentioned earlier. We have the very well-known story in Genesis chapter 3 of Adam and Eve eating from the tree that God told them they weren't to eat from.

And they did have a whole load of other trees to choose from. But gosh, aren't we the same? When we're told not to do something, isn't that the very thing we often end up doing?

Sin is fundamentally when we reject God's ways in order to go our own way. In Romans 5, Paul talks about it and says, therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, in this way, death spread to all people because all people sinned.

[13:29] Paul is effectively saying that death came through one man, namely Adam, because that one man sinned. Furthermore, death came to all mankind because all of us sin.

So Eve was a sinner, Adam was a sinner, and so are each and every one of us. It says in Romans chapter 3, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

And Eve experienced the horror and brokenness of sin because she played a part in bringing sin into the world. But of course, thankfully, sin is not the end of the story.

Eve was a helper. Eve did disobey God. And thirdly, Eve was redeemed. Now, I just want to say there's nothing in the Bible that says Eve actually repented of her sin.

However, there are indicators that Adam and Eve were restored into fellowship with God and were redeemed. We're told in Genesis chapter 3, the Lord God made clothing from skins of animals for the man and his wife, and he clothed them.

[14:53] Adam and Eve were, of course, ashamed because of their sin. And they realized for the first time that they were naked before the Lord. The sin reveals shame.

And God took the skins of animals and covered their shame. And this is an indicator of a sacrifice made by God to cover the shame of sin.

And it's a sign of what God would one day do when he sacrificed his own son to cover the shame of sin for his people, which I'm sure we all remembered as we took communion together this morning.

And we can see redemption in the story of Eve. We can also see redemption through God's prophecy about the Redeemer who would come through the line of Eve.

After Adam and Eve sinned, God pronounced a curse upon them and upon the serpent. These were not only curses, they were prophecies, really, of what was to come.

[16:02] In Genesis chapter 3, verse 15, the Lord says to the serpent, I will put hostility between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring.

He will strike your head and you will strike his heel. God indicates that there will be a lifelong battle between the devil and humanity.

Then God speaks of the offspring of Eve. God speaks of one whom Satan will strike, but this offspring will strike the head of Satan.

Basically, the line of Adam and Eve would continue for many, many generations. From their line would come many biblical heroes.

From Adam and Eve came Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joseph, King David, King Solomon, and many more.

[17:03] However, another offspring from the woman was the Son of God himself, Jesus Christ. And on the cross, Satan would strike Jesus, but by his powerful resurrection and his conquering of sin, Jesus, the offspring of Eve, would strike the head of Satan.

And this is the most beautiful sign of redemption displayed in the life of Eve. Eve was a helper. And yes, Eve disobeyed God, but Eve was redeemed.

And we are all like Eve, more perhaps than we possibly realise. We're all created to help in some form.

We all disobey God, and our sin can be absolutely devastating. But the redemption of God is incredibly more powerful and available to all of us too.

God loves us so much that he created humanity in his likeness and loved us unconditionally. He gave us the ability to help each other and lead the earth as the prize of his creation.

[18:25] He loved us so much that he continues to pursue us even when we sin and fall short. He loves us so much that he offers redemption to us through his son.

God had a plan in creation, a plan for the Garden of Eden and a plan for Eve. Eve had a part to play in God's plan for the world.

And God has a plan for each of us too and a part for each of us to play. Let's commit to spending time with God this week, seeking to get to know the maker of the world who has made us in his image and loves us so much.

It won't be time that's wasted. Let's spend some time reflecting on the part that God wants us to play in his plan.

Perhaps you are playing that part and we can give thanks to God for that. But perhaps some of us aren't and we need God to show us the part he wants us to play.

[19:43] Perhaps you feel challenged. God is speaking to you about disobedience. Perhaps the Holy Spirit is convicting you of something that you have done.

And I'd encourage you to confess that. Take the courage to do that. Trusting in his promise of forgiveness, his grace and redemption.

Let's sit for another moment in God's presence now and allow him to speak to us and reflect on what I've shared.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for reminding us this morning of the Garden of Eden, that special place where you fellowshiped with Adam and Eve.

And Father God, I pray that for each one of us here this morning, you would draw us to a place, a special place where we can meet with you afresh.

[20:56] A place where you would speak to us. Where we would sense more than ever your wonderful love for us.

and where you would reveal to us the part you want us to play in your plan. Please do that, Lord Jesus, we pray, and continue to speak to us and encourage us in our relationship with you.

In your precious name, we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.