

God of the Garden (Genesis 2:4-25)

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[0 : 00] All right, if you can keep your Bibles to Genesis. Remember, we have been going through the book of Genesis so far as a church, and we are up to Genesis 2, verse 4.

So let me read that out, and then let's pray for God to give us light from His Word. Genesis 2, starting from verse 4.

This is the Word of the Lord. This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created. It was the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Now the Lord had planted a garden in the east, in Eden, and there He put the man He had formed. And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground, trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.

And in the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river, watering the garden, flowed from Eden.

[1 : 25] From there it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon. It winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. The gold of the land is good. Aromatic resin and onyx are also there.

The name of the second river is the Gihon. It winds through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris. It runs along the east side of Ashur, 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 take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it, you will surely die.

The Lord God said, It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him. Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air.

He brought them to the man to see what he would name them. And whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air, and all the beasts of the field.

[2 : 37] But for Adam, no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. And while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place of flesh.

Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. And the man said, This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.

She shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man. And for this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. Shall we pray? Shall we pray? Lord, this is a beautiful part of your scriptures.

Help us as we take a close-up look at such a perfect place, where you personally crafted the first humans for life with work, life under your word, and with a wonderful wedding at the end of it too.

[3 : 46] So Father, help us to learn from your word today, to be inspired, enriched, and challenged. We pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. I'd love to ask one question right now.

How many of you have a side hustle? How many of you have a side hustle? Or how many of you have some other second job, part-time thing that you dabble in?

How many of you have a side hustle? Some of you here, you do flowers, right, as your side hustle. Some of you, you teach piano perhaps while you have another job, or I don't know if it's the other way around.

Some of you take photos on your weekends off. A lot of us have a side hustle, don't we? And for our family, we have a side hustle too. Our family deliver newspapers.

They say you can learn a lot when you walk around your neighbourhood delivering papers. You get a real good glimpse at everyone's gardens, don't you? I don't know if you had your own paper run.

[4 : 49] You started to memorise what different people's gardens looked like. And you can learn a lot from peeking into someone's backyard. Let me tell you from experience, you know, if you look into a garden, it's got heaps of veggies, there's probably some hard-working Asian grandparents hanging out in there, right?

If there's a trampoline, most likely there's some kids who live there. It's probably a young family. If there's artificial turf, probably some really busy people that can't be bothered mowing their lawns.

And if there's like a bulldozer and bricks, like virtually no garden, they're probably trying to get in on the property market. You can learn a lot from peeking into someone's backyard. And so Genesis 2, we get a peek into God's backyard.

And what do we see? What do we learn? That's what we're going to dive into today. Some of you have already followed us through to Genesis 1. We heard from Ian as well, and then myself two weeks ago.

Genesis 1 gave us the God who was there, right? Introduced us to the God who speaks order from disorder, who creates a world full of harmony and balance, ruled by a creator without rival.

[5 : 59] And as human beings, as we heard last week, we're called to mirror, reflect our creator and how we care for his world, how we rest in it.

But from Genesis 2, verse 4, notice where we started reading. The author actually signals a new section of the book of Genesis, right? Because he uses this phrase, this is the account of the heavens and the earth.

Remember Pastor Albert telling us about this Toledot word, saying this is a new section. Pay attention. There's a turn of the page. And what we see, right, is there's a change in camera angle, as it were.

We go from a wide-angle cosmic creation story, Genesis 1, to a close-up account of life in God's backyard. Life in God's garden.

If God seems far off and distant and unknowable to you, then look, Genesis 2 is for you and me. I want to share three main things that we get from this chapter.

[7 : 03] Three close-ups, as it were, right? I think in Genesis 2, we get a couple of close-ups of the garden itself that we came from. Secondly, we get a close-up of two key patterns that shape kind of our existence even today.

And then finally, we get a close-up of a wedding that's still worth celebrating. All right, so those are the three points that I want to share today. All right, three things about this garden, two key patterns, and then we'll talk about the wedding at the end of this chapter.

Let's look first at the close-up of this garden, right? I want to imagine you've come by for a socially distanced backyard barbecue at God's place. What would you see?

What would you see as you looked around his garden? In our close-up of God's garden, I think we'll see several things, but let me share with you. Firstly, we see a perfect place.

We see a perfect place, right? When no shrub of the field had yet appeared and no plant had yet sprung up, right? This is a description of God's perfect place. Rain about to fall.

[8 : 11] Life about to sprout. Moisture ready to do its work. It's ready to blossom. And we learn something important about this place as we heard that description.

Did you notice in verse 8, Now the Lord had planted a garden in the east in Eden. This is our very first place name in the whole of the Bible.

Eden. All kinds of scholars and explorers have actually tried to find exactly where Eden is on Google Maps. But our best guess is kind of somewhere in the region above Saudi Arabia and Israel, that fertile crescent.

Because we have those descriptions of those four rivers, right? So our best guesses are somewhere in this region called Mesopotamia. So today will be modern day Turkey on the east side or Iraq near the Caspian Sea.

And what might help us at this point is to remember our first audience, the first people who read the book of Genesis. Do you remember? Do you remember? They were surrounded by lots of other nations, weren't they?

[9 : 22] And I think it's important for them to hear, right? We might not know exactly where Eden is today. But these descriptions would have reminded them, right?

Eden is not where the nation of Israel eventually ends up, right? They end up on the left near the Mediterranean Sea in that section called Canaan. You see, Eden is actually right in the midst of where other nations lived and had their own glorious gardens.

I don't know if you've heard of the Babylonians, for example. Nations like Babylon with their hanging gardens, right? One of those ancient wonders of the world. Or there were Assyrian kings that lived further up, that top half, who would showcase their power and greatness with gardens full of exotic trees.

But then what does God say? Verse 9 says, The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground, trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. I think God is trying to say that in His backyard is an amazing garden.

Don't listen to those other nations, those other voices, those other powers. My garden is the greatest. My place is the best. Paradise is found in my world.

[10 : 41] And we need that reminder too today, don't we? We stress so hard about a block of land sometimes. Or a safe place. Paradise is not found only in a quarter acre block that you can buy.

Paradise won't be found today in having certain freedoms or certain restrictions. Paradise can only be found in God alone. And here we see His perfect place.

It's a bit about the place itself. Let's think about the God who is there, right? I think the second thing we see in our close-up Backyard Garden tour is we see a personal God, right?

The Lord Himself. I wonder if you notice the shift in how Genesis describes God. God is no longer the kind of cosmic, all-over-the-world creator from the previous chapter.

Because I want you to notice how He's described, right? From Genesis 2, verse 4 onwards, it says, The Lord God. And that is repeated right throughout this chapter.

[11 : 47] What's the significance? For the first time in Scripture, we hear God's personal covenant promise name. It's the name that He reveals to Moses when Moses is at the burning bush, if you remember.

This is the name that reminds the readers that God is keeping His promise to be with His people, to look after His people. This is His name that He reveals to those He loves, that they have a personal relationship with Him.

You see, Genesis 1 was kind of the flashy, well-cut video of God and His works. Genesis 2 was kind of like the behind-the-scenes Netflix documentary, where you get to get up close with God Himself, personally.

Have a look at verse 7. Look how personal he gets. The Lord God formed the man, right? You see, if we're only at Genesis 1, I wonder if God comes across like some guy ordering creation using Uber Eats or something.

You know, call for it and creation comes, right? He is powerful, right? His voice is powerful. But Genesis 2 adds a new dimension. The God of the Bible, He is personal.

[13 : 06] He personally forms the man. He blows life into him. And He plants the garden. And later He speaks to the man directly, doesn't He?

Friends, this is a God who will dig His hands in the ground, as it were, who will craft and construct, who even walks in the garden with them. He is no distant voice.

He is no faraway thing. He is no blind watchmaker. In paradise, we see God personally walking with His people.

And that is the kind of God you and I need and yearn for, isn't it? A personal God. One who is close to us. In this perfect place, we have a personal God, yes.

But one more stop on our garden tour. We want to point out, obviously, that there is also man that's created, right? And that's an important part, too. Let me finish the rest of verse 7.

[14 : 08] It says, The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. And the man became a living being.

Let me note two things here, just from the original text. Firstly, some of your translations might say, from, right? The Lord formed the man from. Actually, the original text doesn't have the word from.

It kind of, I'll explain later. And then secondly, there's actually an important play on words that it's hard to see in the English. The word Adam, we know Adam's name, right?

In Hebrew means human, right? Or humanity. While the word Adama means the earth or the ground. Adam, Adama. Can you see the similarities there?

Okay? And so actually, a closer translation of this verse, verse 7, would be something like, Then the Lord formed a man, dust of the ground.

[15 : 09] All right? Or if you wanted to try and get that wordplay, maybe you'd say something like, The Lord God formed the earth man, dust from the earth. You know, earth man, earth. I don't know how you'd do it. Maybe it's crafted the dude from the dirt.

Some way, yeah. You're trying to get some wordplay going here. I think what the author wants to emphasize is this. We don't just come from dust. We are dust.

Hard to imagine, right? If you feel fit in the prime of your life, but maybe it only takes a pandemic, an outbreak, an accident in your life to remind us how fragile we are as human beings, how finite we are.

But let's read on, because we are more than just dust. That is true. But the verse keeps going, right? It says, He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. And so there's that paradox.

We are dust of the earth, and we have God's breath in us. Isn't that amazing? No other creature in the world has that behind him.

[16 : 15] It's beautiful, isn't it? And I think that it connects and adds on to all the other things we've learned so far in Genesis, right? Why should we follow God's creation pattern and rest regularly?

Because we are dust. We're not immortal. Why should we treat all people with worth and dignity and respect? Because it's his breath in our lungs.

Friends, don't let coffee or adrenaline fool us. We are utterly dependent on our maker for every breath. We are dust. And yet, because his breath swirls in us, we have dignity and worth from the moment we are conceived until the day we die.

Those are two twin truths that we need to hear over and over again. We are dust, yet we have God's breath in us. This is truth to help us, right? Make friends with our neighbours who are fellow breathing beings.

To protect the vulnerable among us who are like dust. To stand firm against the senseless invasion, right? That we've been hearing in the news. Because they are living beings of God.

[17 : 29] All this we see from a close-up of life in God's garden. I think the second main thing we see from this chapter, and I'll just share that briefly, is that I think we see a close-up of two patterns that shape our life even today, right?

So I've just given us a brief tour, you know, wish it could be longer, of God's garden. But hey, from this, there are two patterns that shape our purpose today.

Let me read verse 15 and we'll see, right? The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. This is verse 15.

And so the first pattern we see in God's good garden is this. There is life with work. I don't know how you feel when I say work, right?

You might be like, yay! Or you might be, oh, okay. But look, what chapter one implied, right, with God giving mankind seed-bearing plants and trees to look after.

[18 : 37] Now he explicitly says, he takes Adam, he places him in the garden to look after it and to protect it. God the gardener assigns a gardener to help him out.

This is the first employment offer in the Bible, friends. Right? If Adam had a business card, it would say, I don't know, plant manager. What do you do during the week, mate?

Oh, yeah, I look after God's perfect place and under a very personal manager. He's pretty cool. And look, I know I'm dusty, but it's a pretty dignified job. Okay? This is important.

Don't miss the importance of just this one verse. It tells us, right, while our work today, okay, is affected by the curse of sin. We'll explore that in chapter three.

We must realize that work in and of itself is not a bad thing. It's actually a good gift. It's not an obligation. Oh, we'll have to do this to keep the world running.

[19 : 33] It's a gift that God gives us to join in his work. And it's a key way that we're going to reflect God's own hardworking nature. I think that's why Paul, right, you know, the Apostle Paul, he can say to slaves in Ephesians 6, serve wholeheartedly like Jesus is your boss.

Or he can even call bosses to remember they have our master in heaven. Or why even Jesus himself can be a builder's son. And that's a good and holy thing. I don't know about you, but sometimes I hear in church circles, kind of the wrong idea.

Sometimes I hear that some people say, oh yeah, you know, if I get to stand up here and serve, that's worship. And then I go back to reality, you know, the rest of my life, my studies, my job, whatever.

Or wow, you know, going on a missions trip, leading a group, that is doing Christian stuff. That connects me with God. while doing chores at home or just being a good, you know, child or a good parent, that's not.

We assume, I think, that stuff that we do in church is holy and then the office life is not. But the Bible doesn't tell us that, does it? All right?

[20 : 47] work here is worship. And every calling, including Adam's one, including our one, is holy. When a guy called Martin Luther, he rediscovered this truth, he was able to even say something like this, the Christian shoemaker doesn't just do his duty by putting crosses on his shoes.

He does it by making good shoes because God cares about good craftsmanship, good work. And so, friends, whether you work in retail or in IT, whether you're studying right now, whether you change nappies as part of your work, whatever your vocation, as you play your part in keeping and watching like Adam did, you are doing something good and worthwhile.

Work is good. Work is a gift. I think that's the first pattern that God gives us, right, in Genesis chapter 2. Have a look at the next two verses and I think you see another pattern.

And this one is also just as important, right? A life under his word. And the Lord God commanded the man, you are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it, you will surely die.

Let's be honest. How many of you have read this and thought, that sounds a little bit unfair? Or, man, why put the trees there if they couldn't eat them in the first place?

[22 : 15] Come on, God. But let me point out the obvious first and foremost, right? Sometimes we read this and we assume we know it. The first command though is not, don't eat, right?

Did you see it? What is the first thing that God says? You are free to eat. I think we forget that. We might have missed the character of God. Actually, God's heart is not first and foremost mean.

He has a rule. His word is not first and foremost, let me be stingy to you. He first says, eat from any tree in the garden. Before he says, but not that one.

The pattern God is laying down here is this. He is saying that every creature, including us as humans, must live life under his word. You see, so far, every creature, part of God's creation, acts and moves under his command, right?

Under his voice, the land, the sea, the skies, the sun, the moon, the stars, all the creatures, they go where God says. And now the question comes, will Adam live life under God's word or will he not?

[23 : 28] Dun, dun, dun, we'll find out soon. But for now, let's realize this. If we are masters of the universe, then yes, do whatever we like. It doesn't matter. But if God is creator and we are his creatures, it is good and right that he calls the shots, that life is lived under his word.

When he says, eat this and this and this and this, we should and we should enjoy it. And when he says, don't eat from there, he is inviting us to trust him, not ourselves.

And so the question we can all ask is, will you and I live under God's word? And how Adam answers is literally a life or death issue. I mean, it's the same questions, okay?

Remember the Israelites a bit later on, okay? They start wandering in the wilderness. We were reading this passage as a family earlier this month. And they're told what to eat, right?

in excruciating detail in the book of Leviticus. You know, Leviticus chapter 11, eat this, not that, eat this, not that. What's going on there? I think again, God is asking them, live life under my word, even in how you eat.

[24 : 41] Will they do that or will they die in the wilderness? Same question for us, I think. In our work, in our rest, in how we shape our lives and make our choices, will you and I live under God's word and so enjoy what he offers or will we choose disobedience and surely die?

We will find out more next time. But before that sad story, surely, let's close up at the, probably the most exciting part of this chapter for some of you, right?

First wedding, we're seeing the garden, the God, the man, we're seeing two patterns, foundational to our purpose in life and now, the first wedding. I notice how in verse 18, right, this is how God starts, he says, it is not good.

This is the first time he says something is not good, right? He said, this is good, this is good, this is good, look, you're good and then he goes, it's not good, something's wrong. It's not good for the man to be alone.

And I imagine that when, in verse 19 and 20, the Lord parades all the animals in front of him, right, Adam gets to name them all but he also gets to see firsthand that he's single, right?

[26 : 02] Because all these animals come, they probably come in pairs and he's being reminded, right, I'm the only single here at a married couples event. But what does the verse keep going on to say?

But for Adam, no suitable helper was found. The word helper here is worth just explaining, all right? I think in English sometimes the word helper can mean someone that's kind of just, you know, just coming to help, you know, like one of my kids helps me to do the dishes but really I'm doing it sort of thing.

In Hebrew though, the word helper has a different meaning, right? In Hebrew, the word used here is often used about God himself. You guys know the psalm, right?

I lift up my eyes to the hills, where does my help come from? Okay? Adam, it's not good that Adam is alone but he doesn't need just a doorstep.

He doesn't just need a PA or an apprentice. Adam needs a strong partner, a helper, to turn God's garden beside him. Not just a clone of himself but someone that will compliment him, be distinct from him yet be there with him.

[27 : 14] And that is exactly what God proceeds to craft for him, isn't it? Right? Verse 21, 22, it's always funny when you think about it, he KO's the dude, he takes part of the man's side and as if he was a master builder, he crafts, he builds a woman, walks her up the aisle to the astonished man.

How about that? You know, I was fairly surprised, this was last year, year before, when at Caris and Rio's wedding, some of you were there, they burst into song, right?

Do you remember that moment? When, you know, when, yeah, when the bride, when Caris first appeared in the processional. But it seems like that's exactly what Adam does here, right?

He bursts into a bit of a song, some kind of poetry. This now is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. He shall be called woman for she was taken out of man.

You can almost sense the relief, the joy, the excitement. There's no mention of children here. But we know from chapter one, God is blessing mankind to do that, right?

[28 : 21] To be fruitful and multiply. Maybe he's relieved because it takes two to raise a family, at least. And remember Adam's job description, plant manager?

Well now, I think he's joyful because he can share it with someone that can be suitable for him, a woman. I think sometimes it takes two to delight in the work God gives us.

And so perhaps reflecting on this, the author then says in verse 24, for this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh.

You see, every wedding between a man and a woman anywhere in the world today is worth celebrating. Whenever a boy meets a girl and they unite under God's name, his blessing, the Bible says here's a picture of what our creator has blessed this world with, what he wants for all his image bearers, unity and difference, to be fruitful and multiply, to steward this world as partners, men and women with different gifts.

sin will soon scar this beautiful picture. But for now, man and wife are naked and unashamed. For now, the Bible gives us a beautiful vision of marriage, right?

[29 : 44] This fruitful, life-giving partnership. It's distinct yet undivided. It's different in role, yes, but identical in dignity and worth. And because of that, I think, this wedding is still worth celebrating.

There's one final picture that this wedding points to, though, that we mustn't miss. We mustn't miss it. For this, though, we need to hear the words of the Apostle Paul and he writes and reflects a marriage some thousands of years later.

And so, with your Bibles, if you can flip with me briefly to Ephesians chapter 5, verse 31 to 32. And some of you might remember this from when we went through it as a church.

This is what it says, for this reason, this is Paul quoting Ephesians, a man, quoting Genesis, for this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh.

This is a profound mystery, but I'm talking about Christ and the church. Here, Paul refers to how husbands and wives are called to display the gospel in their marriage, never in abusive, hurtful, or humiliating ways.

[31 : 03] Paul urges wives to willingly submit to their husbands' lead. He then asks husbands to love their wives sacrificially, putting their needs above his own. But then, by quoting Genesis 2.24, Paul is saying, yes, this vision of marriage from the first book of the Bible is going to be a permanent picture to bless all of humanity.

He says then, it's a profound mystery and I'm saying that it refers to Christ and the church. One of the ironies of the book of Genesis is how often this permanent picture of God's blessing that we see in this first poem, right, leaving father and mother to become one flesh.

If you read the book of Genesis, you'll know that that is not what always happens. There's all kinds of sad ways that people have used their relationships in bad ways.

Whether it's Abraham pretending that Sarai's his sister, whether it's Jacob having to mess about with two wives and then even more later. And I think likewise, today, we think of this picture and we look at the reality in our lives.

Our divorced parents, yet another affair amongst friends. Life today reminds us how far we have strayed from this first wedding. doesn't it?

[32 : 23] The wedding photo has been smashed. The rings have been tarnished or lost. And yet, what does Paul do here? Paul, a single man, remember, he invites all of us to marvel at what Genesis 2.24 ultimately points to.

To remember that every wedding ceremony you attend, every reception you celebrate at, is a preview of a more important wedding where Christ is united with his church, his bride, those he loved and bled for and died for.

at the first wedding, Adam cries out with joy, yes, but at the final wedding, it's Jesus with tears in his eyes, watching his bride, the church, walk up the aisle.

on that day, he's ready to take her with his nail-pierced hands. And every wedding that you and I will see will echo this gospel.

Every man, every woman who turns from their sins, pledges themselves, vows themselves to Jesus, the bridegroom, they join the one wedding that matters most, right?

[33 : 43] Loved and cherished with Jesus forever. And so the final question is will you be there? It's one thing to be invited to the next fancy PCBC wedding.

I don't know who it will be, all right? But far more important is for you and I to turn to Jesus and join his wedding party to become the men and women we were meant to be.

Thanks to the God of the garden, what we see in Genesis 2 is far more than just a pretty wedding, right? As one songwriter put it this way, what we see here is the story of the Son of God hanging on a cross for me.

And this ends with a bride and groom and a wedding by a glassy sea. And we know that in Christ who loves his bride, the church, this is true.

This story is true. So will you pray with me? Father, we were once your enemies.

[34 : 54] We were so far away from you and yet now we are seated at your table. So we thank you. We thank you for that. So Lord, help us remember from this beautiful wedding story the greater wedding to come, the one that we should all want to be a part of.

Help us turn from our sins, follow Jesus Christ and be there on that final day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.