

Spreading the Garden

We often talk about meaning and purpose in life. Looking at the first couple in the garden informs God's purpose for humanity. He places Adam and Eve in the garden, blesses them, and instructs them to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. They are, of course, to do all these things while in dynamic relationship with God. God's blessing presupposes His presence in their lives. In the garden they are to "serve" and "guard" it as well as spread its borders (i.e. fill the earth). This type of "garden" (*gan* in the Hebrew) was known for having a definite border, much like shrubs used for privacy hedges. God's purpose for the couple is for them to multiply (i.e. create family) and spread through the earth. As they do, they are to spread the blessed condition of the garden throughout the less inhabitable earth bringing earth to its fullest potential and filling it with His glory, perfect rule, and presence as His image bearers and priests.

In this endeavor we need not limit our understanding to gardening proper. God does not intend for us all to quit our jobs and become gardeners. Much more is in view here anticipating all of the cultural achievements of mankind. We get a preview of this in Genesis 4 with the creation of instruments and tools.

Twofold Purpose

We may describe God's purpose for humanity in Genesis 1-2 as twofold. Human creatures are made for:

1. Relationship: In contrast to other ANE creation accounts, God does not create the human creature because He necessarily needs them for His own survival and well-being. He creates human creatures because He desires to enjoy them in community with Himself. It is out of His love that He creates us (similar to how we create children out of love – or at least that is the way it is ideally meant to be). Further, in order for the man and woman to carry out their purposes well, they will need to remain in relationship with God in order to receive wisdom to properly feel, think and make decisions with His mind.

2. Mission: There is a sense in which we might also say God creates the human creatures for a mission, namely, to spread His glory and knowledge throughout the earth through the relationships and tasks God has given them.

This same twofold mission also shows up in the life of Israel. God first and foremost chooses Israel because He loves her. She wasn't any better than the other nations, more impressive, or anything else. It was simply and purely out of love (Deut. 7:7-9).

At the same time, God does have a mission for the Israelites to be a light to the nations and spread His knowledge and glory through the earth (Deut. 4:5-8). This same two-fold purpose of relationship and mission is reiterated throughout the gospels. God loves us and desires relationship to be with us – and yet also has a mission for us to go and make disciples of all nations while enjoying His presence (cf. Matt. 28:18-20).

Who are you and why are you here?

We began asking the two important worldview questions with which every human creature is faced:

Who am I?

Why am I here?

Hopefully you starting to formulate your own answers informed by God's revealed truths in Genesis 1 and 2. We might answer something like:

Who am I? I am a son or daughter of YHWH Elohim made in His image and as His likeness. As such, I am imbued with the utmost dignity and immeasurable worth. He has bestowed upon me the honor and responsibility of being a royal-priest in His good creation.

Why am I here? God created me simply and profoundly because He loves me and desires to have me in His presence (Relationship). Though God has also created me for a plan He has prepared for me to walk in (Mission). He calls me to engage with the world and rule over as a royal-priest enjoying Him while spreading His splendor and presence in all to which I put my hands and commit my time – relationships, career, hobbies, etc. He has uniquely wired and gifted me ways to peculiar only to me in order to uniquely contribute to the unfolding story of creation.

What's in your garden? While God probably did not put you in a literal garden (or maybe He did), you do have a "garden." Your life is a garden consisting not least of your relationships, jobs, possessions, dreams that are important to you and to the heart of God. Just like Adam and Eve, God is calling you to serve and guard your garden and, in a sense, spread its borders. Perhaps take some time with God to think about what is in your garden. What things of your garden are most important to you? In what ways is God calling you to care for these things? Afterall, gardens take A LOT of work. It's not long before the weeds intrude. Anyone living through a STL

summer knows about the constant watering that is needed. Gardens cannot thrive by being left to themselves but require constant care and vigilance. So:

What is in your garden (try to list four or five things)?

In what way is God inviting you to be a royal-priest who reflects His image and mediates His benevolent presence to these things?