

Vocation: Labor and Leisure in Christian Perspective  
Beverly Heights Presbyterian Church  
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III. Genesis 2: Cultivating the garden of God without

- A. The human as “earthling” or the “dirty” human. Adam was created “of dust from the ground,” and Genesis 2 has twenty references to the dirt/ground, etc: land/*eret*, 5; ground/*adamah*, 5; garden/*gan*, 5; field/*sadeh*, 4; dust/*afar*, 1. If we add the fifteen references to “Adam,” an obvious derivative of *adamah*, there are 35 references to the soil/earth, etc. Not surprisingly, later passages of Scripture reflect on the reality of the human’s “earthly” derivation.

Gen. 3:19 By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground (*adamah*), for out of it you were taken; for you are dust (*afar*), and to dust you shall return.; Gen. 3:23 ...therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden (*gan*) of Eden to work the ground (*adamah*) from which he was taken.; Gen. 18:27 Abraham answered and said, “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust (*afar*) and ashes.”; Psalms 103:14 For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust (*afar*).; 1Cor. 15:47 The first man was from the *earth*, a man of *dust*; the second man is from heaven. 48 As was the man of *dust*, so also are those who are of the *dust*, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. 49 Just as we have borne the image of the man of *dust*, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

- B. An Inert, Fruitless Garden, for Two Reasons:

“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...” (Gen. 2:6).

“Work” here (*shamar*) is the same verb that appears in Gen. 2:15, below

- C. What is “not good” in Genesis 2:18?

- D. What is Eve “called” even before she is made? “I will make him a helper (*ezer*) fit for him” (עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ, *ezer knegdo*, 2:18),...20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him (עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ, *ezer knegdo*).

“Helper” is not a mere assistant; “helper” is a critical ally in the duty to exercise dominion over the earth. Of the 15 appearances of the term *ezer* in the Hebrew Bible (outside of the two in Gen. 2), 11 of the 15 refer to God himself, ordinarily as Israel’s (or her king’s) military “aid/help,” who defeats Israel’s enemies.

Deut. 33:7 And this he said of Judah: “Hear, O LORD, the voice of Judah, and bring him in to his people. With your hands contend for him, and be a *help* against his *adversaries*....29 Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the *LORD*, the shield of your *help*, and the sword of your triumph! Your enemies shall come fawning to you, and you shall tread upon their backs.” Psalms 121:1 I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my *help* come? 2 My *help* comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. Psalms 124:8 Our *help* is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth. Psalms 146:3 Put not your trust in princes, ...5 Blessed is he whose *help* is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God...

The references to other “helpers” than Yahweh are ordinarily military also, as when God’s prophet predicts doom on the Israelites during their captivity to Babylon: “And I will scatter toward every wind all who are around him, his *helpers* and all his troops, and I will unsheathe the sword after them” (Ezek. 12:13-14).

“Therefore a man *shall leave* (יָצָא, *qal* imperfect) his father and his mother and *shall hold fast* (יָדָבַק, *qal* perfect) to his wife, and they *shall become* (יִהְיֶה, *qal* perfect) one flesh.” (Gen. 2:24)

Reiterated by Christ and his apostles, this text indicates that the union of man-and-wife, for the purpose of establishing its own economy/household (note that it involves also the “leaving” of the other order), is a divinely-ordered institution.

- E. Two-part cultivating: “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.” (v. 15, ESV), could be translated “serve” and “guard/preserve.” (Hebrew *avad* and *shamar*), words that Moses does not pair again until Num. 3:7-8:

“They shall keep guard (*shamar*) over him and over the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, as they minister (*avad*) at the tabernacle. They shall guard (*shamar*) all the furnishings of the tent of

meeting, and keep guard (*shamar*) over the people of Israel as they minister (*shamar*) at the tabernacle.”

Eden is here portrayed as a sanctuary, a holy place where holy God dwells; the humans are portrayed as priests, preserving (*shamar*) its holiness and doing holy service (*avad*):

T. Desmond Alexander: “Recent research on the opening chapters of Genesis has drawn attention to various ways in which the garden of Eden resembles later Israelite sanctuaries. The entrances to Eden and later sanctuaries are located to the east and guarded by cherubim.” *The City of God and the Goal of Creation* (Crossway, 2018), p. 18. Meredith G. Kline: “Reflecting the identity of Eden as a sanctuary was the priestly responsibility assigned to man to guard the garden from profanation.... When man forfeited his priestly role, guardianship of the holy site was transferred to the cherubim.” “Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony,” in *Essential Writings of Meredith G. Kline* (Hendrikson Publishing, 2017), pp. 23-24. G. K. Beale: “In the Holy of Holies, cherubim are woven in the curtain separating the ark of the covenant (e.g., Ex 25:18-22; 26:1, 31-34). Just as the angelic cherubim guarded the way back to God’s presence in Eden (Gen. 3:24)...., so the sculpted cherubim guard the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies.” *God Dwells Among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth, with Mitchell Kim* (InterVarsity Press, 2014), p. 53.

Genesis 2 regards the human as *from* the earth and *for* the earth, as it were. Agriculture is one of the highest human callings, as the image of God, made *from* the earth, devotes himself to *serving* and *preserving* the earth.

F. The Garden’s Two Latent Properties: Beauty and Utility (ESV “pleasant to the eyes and good for food,” CEB “every beautiful tree with edible fruit,” Douay-Rheims “fair to behold, and pleasant to eat of,” ERV “all the beautiful trees that were good for food”)

1. “Pleasant to the sight” is probably a metonymy (or synecdoche) that includes the other four senses, and “sight” is regarded as the most important sense. “Pleasant” is also translated “delightful,” “desirable,” “beautiful.”

2. “Good for food” is probably a metonymy (or synecdoche) that includes other useful or life-sustaining qualities: good for tool-making, good for shelter, good for clothing, etc.

Gen. 4:20 Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in *tents* and have livestock.

21 His brother’s name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. 22

Zillah also bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all *instruments of bronze and iron*.

3. Whose “sight” and whose “food”? Implicit in the answer is our mandate to strive for the richest flourishing for all *humans*, that their lives would be replete with all things practical or lovely.

4. God, in whose image/likeness the human was created, made a garden that was both *beautiful* and *practical*; He was both *artist* and *artisan*, and the human, bearing the divine image, is to cultivate that garden by discovering and developing its potentials for beauty and its potentials for utility.

Robert Penn Warren (d. 1989) asked John Crowe Ransom (d. 1974) what he most wanted in life, and Ransom replied, “To make a beautiful thing.” The German author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) advised, “One should, each day, try to hear a little song, read a good poem, see a fine picture, and, if it is possible, speak a few reasonable words.” Toqueville lamented America’s pragmatism: “It must be acknowledged that in few of the civilized nations of our time have the higher sciences made less progress than in the United States; and in few have great artists, distinguished poets, or celebrated writers been more rare.”

G. Genesis 2 can be usefully summarized by its pairings: Adam and Eve, serve and preserve/guard, beautiful and practical.

H. Genesis 1 teaches us to cultivate the *image* of God *within*; Genesis 2 teaches us to cultivate the *garden* of God *without*.