

BEGINNINGS: Lesson Three
Creation: The Beginning of Family Life and Work
Genesis 2:4-25

Subject: God gave Adam a personalized location, assignment, and partner.

Main Idea: Because we are the apple of God's eye (Dt 32:10, Ps 17:8, Zech 2:8), He has a very personal interest in us.

Principles:

1. *God has chosen a location and a work assignment that are just right for each of us.*
2. *God puts special people in our lives to complete us.*

Introduction

Fifty-nine people were shot dead in Las Vegas in 2017 and more than five hundred were injured. Does God care? Where was He? Where was God when nine people were killed during a prayer meeting at Emanuel Church in downtown Charleston in 2015? Does God just not care? Is He impotent? Maybe, as deists suggest, after God made the world, He stepped away and now just observes us fending for ourselves.

These questions were certainly relevant in Moses' day. When God commissioned him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, God's people had been suffering under the oppression of slavery for generations. As they struggled to get their abused bodies out of bed each morning, as they took the whip one more time, don't you think they wondered if there was a God who cared?

We've been considering that the early chapters of Genesis answer the questions, "Who is God? What is our relationship to Him?" and "How does He feel about us?" Our passage this week clearly answers that last question for Israel and for us. From the beginning, God has taken a very personal interest in mankind.

In three passages found later Old Testament (Deuteronomy 32:10; Psalm 17:8; Zechariah 2:8), one of them penned by Moses, God's people are described as *the apple of His eye*. In Hebrew, as in English, "apple of one's eye" is an idiom of care, endearment, and love. The term denotes the center (or pupil) of the eye, the part we would instinctively protect, but in Hebrew, it literally translates the "little man of the eye," probably coming from "the little image one sees of himself when looking into another's pupil."¹ But one doesn't have to read that far into the Bible to know how God feels about us. As we shall see, the second chapter of Genesis highlights God's very personal interest in and involvement with the man and woman He had made.

I. A Special Place, Special Work, and Special Instructions - Genesis 2:4-17

A. Comparing Genesis 1 and Genesis 2

i. Toledot

1. This Hebrew word that is found at the beginning of verse 4 translates “this is the account of” or “these are the generations of” and Moses used the word/phrase eleven times in Genesis. The *toledot* of Genesis help subdivide the account, although there is disagreement among scholars about whether it marks the beginning or the end of a division.
2. In Genesis 2:4, the use of the term indicates a shift in the subject matter. The focus of the account changes from the basic events of creation, with the primary purpose of introducing us to our Creator, to the beginning of human history.

ii. God and LORD God

1. *Elohim*: In Genesis 1:1-2:4, we were introduced to the Creator, *Elohim*. The term *Elohim* emphasizes God’s general providence, His power, and His role as Creator. It is the Hebrew term that we translate “God,” but it was also used by other languages (Assyrian and Ugaritic) to designate their “gods” and elsewhere in the Old Testament to speak of the “gods” of other nations.ⁱⁱ It was a very general term.
2. *YHWH*
 - a. Interestingly, just as the Genesis account shifts the focus to human history, a new name for God, *YHWH*, is introduced. Prior to 2:4, Moses only used *Elohim*, and beginning in Genesis 4, the name *YHWH* is used alone, but in chapters 2-3 the two most common biblical names for God, *Elohim* and *YHWH* (translated *LORD God*), are repeatedly used in combination. Surely, the writer intended to make a special point. The name *YHWH* is much more personal than *Elohim*. It is our God’s personal and proper name, and it emphasizes His covenantal relationship with His people.
 - b. *YHWH* is often referred to as the *tetragrammaton*, meaning “consisting of four letters” (the Hebrew alphabet has no vowels). With Latinized vowels added, the name is “Yahweh.” It means “He is” (the third person form of the Hebrew “*I Am*”).
 - c. In English, *YHWH* is typically translated “LORD.” However, in the 16th century, it became popular to translate *YHWH* “Jehovah.” Some translators still use this term.

- d. The Jews were afraid to pronounce *YHWH*, lest they break the commandment to not take the Lord's name in vain. So, rather than saying the holy name *YHWH* when they came across it in writing, they would substitute a third term, "*Adonai*."

3. *Adonai*

- a. The Hebrew word "adonai" means "owner, husband, master, or lord." It does not appear in Genesis 2-3 but is used elsewhere in the Old Testament. Since both terms are translated using the same English word ("Lord"), in order to distinguish between the two, some translators render *YHWH* as "*LORD*" (all capital letters) and *Adonai* as "Lord" (with only the "L" capitalized).

iii. The Documentary Theory (or Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis): This popular theory developed at the end of the 19th century, suggesting that the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) was written by four different authors, long after Moses' time, and then compiled by another individual after Israel's exile:

1. The "E" Writer: the one who used the term *Elohim*
2. The "J" Writer: the one who used the term *Jehovah* (or *Yahweh*) for God
3. The "P" Writer: the one who gave priestly information in the Pentateuch
4. The "D" Writer: a Deuteronomic author

Proponents of the theory believed the change of God's name in Genesis 1 and 2 supported the idea, and that the *Elohim* writer ("E") wrote chapter 1 and the *Jehovah* (*Yahweh*) writer ("J") wrote chapter 2. Today, this idea has been largely discredited. Scholars who accept the divine authenticity of Scripture have always refuted it, since Jesus clearly indicated that Moses was the author of Genesis (some editing through the years is to be expected – like the addition of the account of Moses' death).

iv. Summary

1. The best view of Genesis 1 and 2 is that they are complementary accounts. Genesis 1 emphasizes God's power and divine nature, as implied by the Hebrew general term for God *Elohim*. Genesis 2 emphasizes God's personal relationship with man, implied by the name *Yahweh* (*Jehovah*) – or *LORD*.

2. In combination (as used repeatedly in chapters 2-3), “YHWH Elohim” identifies *Yahweh* as *Elohim* (the Creator), indicating that the Creator is not just one of the many pagan gods worshipped in antiquity. He is the LORD, the covenant God of Israel, the same personal Being who revealed Himself to Moses, and who reveals Himself to us today in the Scriptures. Additionally, the combined name emphasizes the Creator’s very personal relationship with Adam and Eve.

B. Mankind and the Garden of Eden

- i. Before Plants or Shrubs Grew (2:5-6): The language of Genesis 2:5-6 is ambiguous. Various attempts have been made to reconcile the statement in verse 5 that shrubs and plants had not yet appeared with the Genesis 1 account, which indicates vegetation was created before the first man.
 1. Those who hold to the literary framework view of the “days” of creation in Genesis 1 find no conflict, since they do not see the “days” of creation as reflecting a chronological sequence of events.
 2. Those who see the “days” of Genesis 1 as chronological have made various suggestions. One view is that Genesis 2:5-6 reflects a *certain kind* of plant life that had not yet appeared, not vegetation in general, but plants and shrubs “of the field” (a phrase omitted in some translations). This view suggests the possibility that only self-propagating, “seeded” plants grew prior to the Fall, while those requiring cultivating and weeding appeared after the Fall, when the man had to work “by the sweat of his brow” (3:17-19).ⁱⁱⁱ
- ii. The Creation of the Man (2:7): The personal LORD God formed the man and breathed life into him.
 1. The term “formed” literally means “to mold clay.”^{iv} The Bible depicts God as a potter and us as His clay (Isaiah 29:16; 45:9; Jeremiah 18:6).
 2. In verse 20, the name *Adam* appears for the man. It is the word “man” but is closely related to the word “ground”. Our creation from dust reflects our frailty. Psalm 103:14 says God “knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD’s love is with those who fear Him.” *Frail as we are, we are the apple of His eye.*

iii. The Garden (2:8-14)

1. 2:8-14 tell us about the Garden, the man's home. The verbs in verses 8 and 19 are correctly translated "had planted" and "had formed" because they are pluperfect in tense. The meaning is *previously* planted or formed. In other words, God did not create man and then the Garden. Rather, God planted this special, park-like home for man prior to his creation.
2. The word *garden* signifies a walled-off or protected area, indicating that it was a special place on planet Earth. To assume that the entire earth was this kind of paradise prior to the Fall would be a misreading of the passage.
3. In Scripture, water often symbolizes life. In Genesis 2, we learn that a vast amount of water existed in Eden. God provided a single river that emitted from Eden. From there, it separated into four rivers. Only the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers are known today. They alone give us clues about the location of Eden. *Hiddekel* is the ancient name of the Tigris and *Perat* is the ancient name of the Euphrates.^v It seems the Garden of Eden was somewhere in the region of the Persian Gulf, and ancient legends confirm this.
4. God planted a great variety of trees in Eden, for both esthetic and nutritious purposes. Two particular trees are named: the "Tree of Life" and "Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil."
5. How beautiful a sight this Garden must have been! How lovely the sound of bubbling and flowing waters! Adam and Eve surely enjoyed the taste of fresh water and the soothing pleasure of bathing and swimming in it. Perhaps they played with the animals in the rivers, even riding down the river atop the larger ones! Since there were a wide variety of trees and animals (2:19-20) in Eden, along with jewels and precious metals, God may have used everything in the Garden to instruct Adam and Eve in the sciences.

C. The Inherent Goodness of Work – 2:15: The LORD God put the man in the Garden to work it, care for it, and eat of it. He intended work to benefit man. Since the gift of work was given *prior* to the Fall, we are greatly mistaken if we view work as resulting from the Curse (Genesis 3). Just as God's image in us is marred by sin, the benefits of work and man's motives in work have also been distorted. What was intended as a creative outlet, physical and mental exercise, and pleasure has become tedious, twisted in nature and an end in itself. Christians should ask God to renew their minds, so that all work is done for His glory – free from drivenness, compulsion, or distorted ends, and with new enthusiasm, energy and creativity.

D. The Command Regarding the Trees – 2:16-17

i. Freedom and Boundaries

1. The man was free to eat liberally from any of the many trees within the Garden. Apparently, this included the Tree of Life! The sole limitation was Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. While one verse in Genesis 2 describes Adam’s restriction, many of the chapter’s verses describe God’s generosity toward him – the beauty and wealth of his environment, the pleasurable work, the variety of trees with nutritious fruits, the peaceful relationship with the animals, and later, the provision of a wife.
2. People often take note of the many commands in the Bible and believe God wants to take all the enjoyment out of life. In reality, God gives us boundaries to safeguard that very enjoyment. One hot summer night, two teenagers hopped over a fence onto a private property with a swimming pool, ignoring the “No Swimming” sign. In the darkness, they failed to see that the pool had been emptied for repairs. One teen enthusiastically dove into the pool and sadly, broke his neck. Never again would he think that rules were intended to keep him from having fun! Just like that “No Swimming” sign, God’s rules provide us with safe boundaries.

ii. Nature of the Knowledge Offered

1. Many suggestions have been offered about the nature of the knowledge the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil offered. Since the tree was both created and named by God, the idea that true and significant knowledge could be gained must have been more than the man’s fanciful notion. Eating the fruit certainly gave Adam and Eve experiential knowledge of evil; by eating it, they would sin. However, some have suggested that the name of the tree implied more, such as a promise of human advancement. As God well understood, even knowledge of this kind would not always be used to mankind’s advantage.
2. The important point to be noted is that however great and real the reward of eating from this tree, the negative consequence would be greater: to eat the fruit would mean *death*.

iii. “You Will Certainly Die”

1. Before the Fall, it seems that mankind was neither mortal nor immortal. Rather, God created him with the potential for either.^{vi} The Tree of Life was available to the man. Though Adam was not yet immortal, eating the fruit of this tree would have been a constant reminder to him of the potential for immortality.

2. The Garden was the place for Adam and Eve to learn obedience. By practicing obedience (refusing to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil while enjoying the fruit of the Tree of Life), it seems they would have experienced spiritual development, eventually leading to immortality. God intended that Adam would learn reliance on Him by continually facing the choice of obedience or disobedience.

Summary Statement: Because we are the apple of God’s eye, He has personal interest in *where* we live and *what* we do.

Illustration: After living in a warm climate most of the years we were raising our family, the Lord led us to move across the country to a much colder climate. In addition to the weather changes, we found the culture was also different from that of the place we had called “home” for so long. There was no doubt in my mind that the Lord had called us here. Yet I found it challenging to embrace the snow, cold, and the mindset of the people in our new home. During our first year, I recall making lists of things I liked about our new location, just to force myself to maintain a positive outlook about it. I did this because I was convinced that, even though no place on earth is the paradise of Eden, this was the place God had chosen for me!

In Acts 17:26 we read, “From one man [God] made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He appointed the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.”

The New Testament also indicates that God is still interested in our work lives. Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Principle: *God has chosen a location and a work assignment that are just right for each of us.*

Application: What is your attitude toward the location in which God has placed you? No doubt, it is not the Garden of Eden. Unless you’ve been intentionally running away from God, you are exactly where He wants you to be at this time in your life. For some reason, He has personally chosen this location for you.

For some reason, He has also charged you with your work. Have you thought of your responsibilities, the big ones as well as the very mundane ones, as personal assignments from the Lord? What have you chosen to focus on: your dislikes of the place you in which you reside or the work you do, or the reasons God has chosen this location and this work for you?

Transition: God’s personal interest in Adam is evident in the special home He designed and the particular assignments and instructions He gave. God was so personally interested in Adam that He also ensured Adam had a perfectly suited life partner.

II. A Special Partner - Genesis 2:18-25

A. An Assignment with a Purpose – 2:18-20

- i. God's Intention: The LORD God stated that it was not good for the man to be alone; He would make a suitable helper for him.
 1. *A Helper*: The statement that the woman would be a “helper” to the man is not in any way intended to denote lesser value to the woman than to the man. Their relationship was one of mutual dependence. One commentator says the words *suitable helper* are better translated “helper matching him,” meaning she supplies what he lacks. “She is his missing rib.”^{vii} The Bible often refers to God Himself as a helper (Psalm 33:20; 70:5). The word emphasizes an essential contribution,^{viii} but in this case, with governing authority given to the man.^{ix}
 2. *Adam's Need for Fellowship*: We have learned that the Triune God enjoys fellowship with Himself. Since man was created in God's image, we are relational beings. While the first man enjoyed a hierarchical fellowship with God, he still needed a mutual fellowship with someone like himself. So God gave Adam an assignment that would make him aware of this need.
- ii. Adam's Assignment: The Lord assigned to Adam the work of naming all the animals. It is easy to imagine that this process would have been educational for Adam. It would have granted him a greater familiarity with the creatures. Additionally, it would have increased Adam's sense of responsibility as their guardian. It also surely gave Adam an opportunity to praise and thank God as he marveled over the uniqueness of each species. Above all, it definitely made him realize that none of the animals were like him. God caused Adam to become aware of his need, already knowing He planned to satisfy it!

B. The LORD God Made the Woman – 2:21-22

- i. Made From Adam's Rib: The text says God put Adam into a deep sleep and used a part of his own body, a rib, to fashion the woman. Frequently in commentaries, more is made of Eve being taken from Adam's side than may be warranted. Perhaps we should simply say that God chose to take a rib from Adam to form the woman so that she would be the man's complement.
- ii. God Brought Eve to Adam: Just as the Lord brought the animals to Adam to be named (2:19), once He created the woman, He brought her to Adam. Adam's reaction shows his immediate joy and recognition that the woman was entirely different from all the animals that God had previously brought him. She was his own flesh, metaphorically (his own family), and in a literal sense as well.

C. Insertion of Commentary – 2:24: In 2:24, Moses inserted a note into the account: “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.” Adam and Eve clearly could not have left their parents to be united to one another. Moses simply used the occasion of Adam and Eve’s uniting to comment on marriage in general.

- i. Implications: Moses chose the term “united” to imply permanence. The passage also implies that marriage is a contract between one man and one woman (as opposed to multiple partners or individuals of the same gender). Although some of the characters of the Old Testament embraced the cultural practice of polygamy, this was never God’s design.
- ii. Meaning of “One Flesh”
 1. When a couple marries, they are to become a new family unit. This doesn’t mean to suggest they should no longer have interest in their families of origin, but it does suggest that even if the separation is not geographical, the primary focus of both the man and the woman is one another and their own new family, over and above those of the families in which they were raised. One’s duty to parents and family of origin become second to duty to one’s spouse.
 2. The state of being “one flesh” is sexual, emotional and spiritual in nature. Although it is symbolized in the act of sex, it goes far beyond it. The sciences recognize the deep effect marriage has on one’s psyche. When attraction is fixed by a permanent commitment, an emotional bond occurs that affects every part of us. The expression “one flesh” is meant to signify this unity.
 3. While God’s command to man to be fruitful in Genesis 1:28 emphasized sexuality, at the end of chapter 2 the emphasis is equally, if not more so, upon *companionship* within the marriage relationship. Marriage is God’s gift to us. It provides us with a complement: Eve’s femininity and Adam’s masculinity combined to make them complete. The power of sexuality, romance and intimacy between a man and woman stems from God’s original design to create them in a way that they *complete* one another and that they yearn for the completeness that the other brings. The trouble in many marriages is that differences between the man and the woman are allowed to become a source of irritation. In truth, these differences are what make married individuals stronger and more complete. What the one lacks, the other supplies.
- iii. The Marriage Portrait: Throughout the Bible, the imagery of a husband and a wife are frequently used to depict God’s relationship with His people (Isaiah 62:5; Ezekiel 16:1-14; Hosea 2:19-20; Ephesians 5:25-33; Revelation 21:9). According to Ephesians 5, Christian marriage is to be a picture of the commitment Christ has to His bride, the Church.

D. Without Shame – 2:25: Although Adam and Eve were literally naked, their nakedness also suggests their sinless state. They were free of all encumbrances, including those that would impede their relationship with one another.

Summary Statement: Just as God’s personal interest in Adam can be seen in His provisions of a home and meaningful work, God also provided Adam with a partner who was his complement.

Principle: *God puts special people in our lives to complete us.*

Application: For many, this includes a spouse – a life partner. For others, God’s personal assignment is to live this life without a spouse. In either case, God brings special people into the lives of all His children because:

- He created us to be relational – in relationship with Him and in relationships with fellow human beings
- God uses the people He puts in our lives to bring us to completion spiritually. This is a process the New Testament refers to as sanctification. He uses the challenges created by our differences to shape each of His children into the person He wants us to be.

Who is the Lord using to complete you? A difficult spouse or child? A trying co-worker? A loving, encouraging partner or friend? What difference would it make in our relationships if we remembered that the *LORD God* appointed those people to be a part of our lives because of His intimate concern for us, not because He doesn’t care, but because He does?

Conclusion

God didn’t begin His self-revelation with an explanation about why He permits evil in the world; He simply told us that He cares. His interest in and involvement with us is intensely personal. Apparently, He didn’t think it was as important for Israel (or us) to receive a philosophy or theology lecture when we are hurting, as it was for us to know that He cares.

The personal LORD God planted a Garden for Adam, and He has appointed your time and place in history. He put Adam in the Garden to work and care for it, and He ordained good works in advance for you. The LORD God brought the woman to Adam, and He brings special people into our lives to complete us. He does all this because we are the apple of His eye.

ⁱ <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/apple-of-the-eye/>

ⁱⁱ Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). In *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (p. 428). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mathews, K. A. (1996). Genesis 1-11:26. *The New American Commentary, 1A, 193*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^{iv} Utey, R. J. (2001). *How it All Began: Genesis 1-11. Study Guide Commentary Series, 1A, 45*. Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International.

^v Smith, J. E. (1993). *The Pentateuch. Old Testament Survey Series*. Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

^{vi} Mathews, K. A. (1996). Genesis 1-11:26. *The New American Commentary, 1A, 193*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^{vii} Carson, D. A., France, R.T., Motyer, J.A., & Wenham, G.J., Ed. (1994). *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

^{viii} Waltke, Bruce C. (2001). *Genesis: A Commentary*, 88. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

^{ix} Waltke, Bruce C. (2001). *Genesis: A Commentary*, 88. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.