

01-02-04-Caring for the Garden

creation, Incarnation, humanity, stewardship, leadership, work, ministry  
Gen 2:15

As God's image-bearers, humans are to *grow* and *guard* His creation.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

–To **preface this talk**, I said, “*God made us in His image on purpose for us to live with purpose,*” and also, “*Who we are is inseparably interwoven with what we do.*” Our text is **Gen 2:15 (HCSB)**, *The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it. **As God's image-bearers, humans are to grow and guard His creation.*** [We **struck out** in the 1<sup>st</sup> inning. Then God joined humanity by Incarnation. Now, it's a whole new ball game. Jesus is leading the Team, we're up to bat again, and Heaven is cheering us on to hit home runs.]

–In my **preface**, I also gave the meaning of “placed” [lit., “to cause to rest”]. God has “placed” us in a garden gathering to rest, relax & recreate! We might think that last word means: *to do fun things instead of work*. But it has 3 other meanings: 1) *to reanimate, repair, renovate, revive, or restore energy*; 2) *to cheer, embolden or encourage*; 3) *to reestablish or create anew*. These last 3 define *what we need for getting back to work*. God wants to **re-create** or restore *who we are* and *what we do*. Our personal identity and work come from God, and He wants to fill them both of them with new life: His life.

–My approach to this theme will follow the questions I asked last night:

#### **I. “Why did God create us as body-spirit beings in the first place?”**

- A. This cosmos *is our home!* God made us from stardust, calling the world of matter “good” and our material bodies “very good.”
- B. Heaven is also home—when God “breathed” *spiritual life* into the 1<sup>st</sup> Adam, He was starting a race of body-spirit creatures with both *animal* and *angelic* natures: we’re a *physical* and *spiritual* combo.
- C. God made us in His image for a special purpose: *to represent Him*.
  1. Our job was twofold: 1) to populate creation with His “image” and “likeness,” and 2) to “have dominion” or to “rule over” creation.
  2. We began with just “the garden”, **but the career of Christ** as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Adam shows that this human government was intended to be both *cosmic* and *celestial* (over “a new heaven and a new earth”).

**TRANS:** As *body-spirit* beings, we were meant to *participate* in both worlds and be *mediators* between them. As *God's image-bearers*, we were to “rule over” those worlds. At the very outset, the 1<sup>st</sup> Adam failed in this *representative role*, but when God's Son became the 2<sup>nd</sup> Adam, He *redeemed us* and *reestablished us* in this *representative role* of *growing* and *guarding* His creation. ***But let's explore this further....***

## II. “How does *the Incarnation* define our calling in a fallen world?”

- A. Sin *disrupted* creation, but we are still *body-spirit* embodiments of *God's image*. (Our *original incarnation* was *the basis* of *Christ's Incarnation*, and *His Incarnation* *restored* the impact of ours.)
1. *Sin damaged*, but didn't *eliminate* our *incarnational* abilities: *mind still worked* with *matter* [**Gen 4:19-22** lists *tent-building*, skill with musical *instruments*, *animal husbandry*, mining and *metallurgy*, *tool-making*]. (*Civilization's advancement* and *cultural development* are a *direct result* of humanity's *incarnational nature*.)
  2. *When God became one of us*, He chose a *carpenter's family* and worked most of His life *with mind* and *muscle in construction*. (He *knows His business*, when He says, “I will build my Church...”)
- B. As the 2<sup>nd</sup> Adam, God's Son became the *Prophet, Priest and King* of a *new human race*, not only *fixing* original humanity's failure, but *calling us* to join Him. (His “**Follow Me!**” *invites us to serve* in these *prophetic, priestly* and *kingly* roles that He restored. )
1. On earth, Jesus *spoke prophetically* for God. (*Now it's our job*.)
  2. His *priestly work* on the Cross calls to us: “Take up your cross!”
  3. And as King with “all authority in heaven and earth,” He tells us, “Go!”

**TRANS:** Our *destiny* isn't to *get past* “*the pearly gates*”, but to *move into the throne room*. *Salvation* is *God's remedial plan* to *restore His fallen human project*. We see no *church services* or *prayer meetings* in **Gen 1-2**. God had us *improving* and *protecting His work*, *naming life forms*, and *procreating more humans* for the *gigantic, challenging job of governing creation*. Getting *saved* and *sanctified* and *spiritually edified* aren't ends in themselves but *the conditions necessary* for getting us ***back on the job*** in our *Creator's workforce*. **So, now....**

## III. “What material and spiritual tasks make up *Christian ecology*?”

- A. **Gen 2:15** helps answer this— *The LORD God took the man and placed him*

His *creation which groans* as it *longs for Resurrection Day*. Let me close with a portion of my poem [“**EARTH'S GROANING**”...]

Listen gently, friend or foe  
Of the God-Man, Christ the Savior.  
Feel Earth's groaning down below,  
Under humankind's behavior.

To possess their liberty  
From the sins in which they wallow.

Hear Earth's moaning as it longs  
For deliverance from frustration.

Listen, hear all Nature's plea  
For the sons of men to follow,

We alone must sing the songs  
That precede a freed creation.]

*Sing boldly*, brothers and sisters, no matter where “*in the garden*” God has “*placed*” you.

3. **Col 3:17**, And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (For *servant-friends of Jesus*, all ground is holy; all work is sacred.)
- B. Also, we need to *discover* and renew our ties with creation [**Loren Wilkinson**: "...reconciliation between persons and their Creator is incomplete if it does not include a reconciliation with the creation from which they are estranged?"] (*Body acceptance* is a good start in repairing the very first human estrangement with creation [*body shame*]. What displays our bond with naked creation more visibly than *birthday suits*?)
- C. To *live out* our calling to care for creation, we must 1) stay aware of the prophetic, priestly and kingly purposes for which God *placed* humanity *in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it*, and 2) always remember that people and relationships are also part of creation.)
1. As prophetic voices, we must speak *God's will* and ways into our work environments. (Planting *godly principles* in *ungodly places* often requires the *wise counsel* and *ongoing prayers* of a small group ministry. If you *aren't* in one, pray today to find one.)
  2. As priestly ambassadors, we must be aware that *our presence* brings Jesus the *Healer* and *Reconciler* to every person and into every situation. (Because Jesus *indwells* our bodies, they are *His holy temples*: our visit becomes His visit; our touch is His touch.)
  3. As leaders and protectors, we must become *skilled* and *bold* in using our King's authority against spiritual darkness.
    - a. We must see beyond the visible— **Eph 6:12** (ISV), For our struggle is not against human opponents, but against rulers, authorities, cosmic powers in the darkness around us, and evil spiritual forces in the heavenly realm.
    - b. We must use every means of grace available to gain victory for God's Kingdom— **2 Cor 10:4-5** (NIV), The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (Tomorrow we will have Holy Communion, and I have found that the *Lord's Table* is one of the most powerful tools for spiritual warfare at our disposal.)

### CONCLUSION:

—**God's image-bearers must grow and guard His creation.** Creation's eye is on us— **Rom 8:19**, The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. God calls us, as co-creating friends, to *serve* and *guard*

*in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it.*

1. Satan still exploits the body-spirit schizophrenia he got started in human self-understanding [**Who** told you that you were naked?"].
    - a. He leads some into materialism: "*Matter is all that matters.*" ("Use it up while you can! *Who dies with the most toys wins!*")
    - b. He leads others into Gnosticism: "*Spirit is all there is.*" ("To be holy, you must beat the flesh and despise all things physical.")
  2. But "the Maker of heaven and earth," has one *will* for both realms: [*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*] Our *fleshly embodiment* is strategic for His plan in managing creation! In our *body-spirit* natures, we're to be His *servant-leaders* over all things.
- B. I addressed this call to tend and guard in a poem (**DIVINE ECOLOGY**)
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| <p>The creation longs for freedom<br/>From a bondage not her own,<br/>For the creatures in God's image<br/>Brought the curse that makes her groan.<br/>We, the race meant to attend her<br/>And to govern her with care,<br/>Have abused and plundered nature,<br/>Adding grief to her despair.</p> <p>But the LORD so loved the cosmos,<br/>With His handiwork arrayed,<br/>That He entered her Himself<br/>To bear the image He had made,</p> | <p>Both to lead His image-bearers<br/>Back to safety, by rebirth,<br/>And to purchase restoration<br/>For the heavens and the earth.</p> <p>We were meant to serve in Eden,<br/>Paradise beyond compare.<br/>We were fashioned from her soil,<br/>Our unfinished job is there.<br/>The description of our duties<br/>Was not changed the day we fell.<br/>While awaiting her renewal,<br/>We must work with her as well.]</p> |
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- C. Before looking at the 1<sup>st</sup> word describing our job of *cares for the garden*, I want to focus on the 2<sup>nd</sup> one: "to watch over."
    1. [**shāmar** means to *keep safe, take care of, keep your eyes on, watch diligently, guard, protect, preserve, defend.*] It implies some threat in "the garden."
      - a. *Physically* (in terms of modern ecology), this *danger* might be a misuse rather than a preservation of the natural environment.
      - b. *Spiritually* (in terms of the context), it means there was an evil being was loose in creation and that a spiritually dangerous tree was in the garden. Creation needed protection from both.
    2. What does this "guardianship" terminology imply for us today?
      - a. In our physical work on earth, we're to be carefully involved *observers*, **not** unconcerned *passers-by*; *protectors* of all God brings under our care, **not** *slackers*; *preservers*, **not** *wasters*.

- b. *Spiritually*, we must *protect against spiritual evil* where God “has placed” us, and *keep what’s forbidden safe* from misuse.

**TRANS:** As *body-spirit* beings, we *guard* in two realms. *On an earthly level*, we should be doing *good ecology* better than non-Christians who have only an earthly motivation for being good at it. *In heavenly terms*, we should be skilled in *spiritual warfare*. As *God’s image-bearers*, we represent Him *bodily* through our *ecological watch-care over creation*, and *spiritually* by *using His authority over evil worldly forces*. That’s what this *2<sup>nd</sup> term* in *caring for the garden* is about. *Now, the 1<sup>st</sup> one:*

#### IV. “How is being *servants of God* shaped by our privilege of being *co-creating ‘friends’ of the Creator?*”

- A. God *finished creation*, then assigned us the task of *cultivating it*.
- [This word, *abad*, means to *work on* or *serve things, people, or God*. When it’s *servng God*, it implies “*joyful liberation*” not “*toilsome labor*.”]
  - Desiring “to work”* is *natural* to humans [Think of *toddlers* who love *tinkering with real tools* rather than toys; *hobbies* that people *work at harder* than at their jobs; “*out-of-work*” adults or *retirees* getting *depressed* unless they’re *servng* as *volunteers* or *doing* something *useful*, something *helpful*.]
  - The modern stigma of work* as “*toilsome labor*” is *turned around* by Christ— *Col 3:23-24*. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.
- B. To “*work*” with creation as a *service to God*—in all the ways this term *abad* implies—is *a divine privilege* entrusted to humans.
- It’s *far from a mechanical or hierarchal* concept of service— *John 15:15*. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you *friends*, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. (With *our incarnation united* to *Christ’s Incarnation*, human *work* and *service* on earth becomes a form of *companionship, collaboration, friendship*—a *return to what we were meant to be* as *co-creators with God*.)
  - Also**, just as *God’s creation* is responsive to *God’s authority*, so this present *sin-cursed creation* still responds to us, as *God’s image-bearers*. It does so *favorably* or *unfavorably*, depending on the degree to which *we do* or *don’t* *embodying* God’s will:
    - This is a *huge* subject in *Scripture*, encompassing everything from *Abel’s blood crying out from the ground* to *Jesus talking*

to a fig tree or telling a sea-storm, “Peace, be still.”

- b. There are also *reports of strange phenomena*, like *plants* and *water* responding to *human emotions* and *moral actions*:
- [**Cleve Backster**, a CIA “lie detector” expert, claims that a lie detector attached to plants recorded this kind of *responsiveness*, even including *memory*. In *one experiment*, a plant responded violently when a man ripped apart a nearby plant. Later, when other men walked in the room, nothing registered. But when the man who had killed the neighboring plant entered the room, the recorded plant reacted violently.]
  - [Japanese researcher, **Masaru Emoto** claims that, when frozen, water previously exposed to *words, pictures, music, or moral actions*, either *formed lovely crystals* or *formless masses*, depending on the *good or bad* nature of what it was exposed to. He believes this shows that water connects all of life and that its responsiveness is *a means by which good thoughts* can effect our *bodies* and shape our *lives and environment*.]
- c. *Scientific materialists* call these experiments “*fairy tales*,” just as they do *the Scriptures that support such evidence*— **Prov 18:20-21** (ISV). The positive words that a man speaks fill his stomach; he will be satisfied with what his lips produce. The power of the tongue is life and death—those who love to talk will eat what it produces.

**TRANS:** Our *words* matter, because we’re *the King’s prophets*. Our *views and attitudes* matter, because we’re *the Kings’s priests*. Our *work matters*, because we’re *the King’s friends*. *Religion tries to serve a God of law*, who is *transcendent* or *distant*. But *we serve a God of love*. He is *imminent* or *close*, and even became one of us by Incarnation. What does *collaborative, human-friendly, co-creating service* with this *loving God* look like? ***This invites our last question:***

#### V. “What does the task of ‘*caring for the Garden*’ have to do with *our many different kinds of work in the secular world?*”

- A. First, we need to rid ourselves from the idea of any work being “*secular*” (“*BUT*,” some might ask, “*how will we separate the sacred from the worldly?*”) *God helps us to navigate* that...
- Mat 6:33a**. “Seek first God’s kingdom and righteousness...” (Placing the *Creator as top priority* keeps our *creational priorities* in order.)
  - Rom 12:2**. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (*God’s will is to live incarnationally with renewed minds in a fallen world*.)