

Beginnings...

A Closer Look at Genesis 1-3

a *Good Soil* series
for small group study

Part 4: *Another Day in Paradise?*

Bible Reading: Genesis 2:4-25

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PREPARATION FOR GROUP LEADERS

We continue in our 6-part series, exploring the first three chapters of the Book of **Genesis**. In this issue, we begin to explore the story of **Adam and Eve**, in what appears to be **a second creation story** possibly from a different tradition (or certainly a refocussed perspective – *zoomed-in*, if you like!). This begins to look at God's relationship with human beings, focussing on God's interactions with the 'original' couple!

Please pray for your group as they prepare to explore this chapter.

PREPARATION FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS (before the session)

Starting at **Genesis 2:4**, we begin to read another perspective on the creation, with a particular focus on **human beings**, telling an origin-story of our relationships with other humans and with God. The first chapter of Genesis gave us everything with a large-scale universal perspective. Now, in chapter 2, we begin to dig deeper into the first of many **relationships** which will be the focus of a significant proportion of the Bible. The Bible always seems interested in the people involved. People matter. Relationships matter. God's love for us and how we relate to God matters. While the outline of this story is often sketched in children's Bibles with colourful drawings (perhaps of the naked Adam and Eve standing conveniently behind a bush!) the details of the story are less well-remembered. Take some time to read this chapter carefully and slowly, and get reacquainted with what the Bible actually says.

What differences do you notice between this (chapter 2) and the first creation chapter? Does anything strike you as strange or unexpected about this version of events?

What was the purpose given to human beings in this chapter? What relationships are present?

How do you imagine those early days for the first humans – life in the Garden of Eden?

STARTING THE SESSION: A PRAYER

Life-giving God,
You breathe life into us;
you animate these atoms and cells into something unique and amazing;
your creative work goes on, generation after generation, and we praise you for all your goodness.
Be with us as we gather around the story of our beginnings today,
and help us to be aware of all the ways you call us into relationship:
as your children; as companions and colleagues with one another; and to care for all creation.
May you renew our sense of purpose, and help us live lives worthy of the calling we have received.
In the name of Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

FINDING OUR ROOTS – some starter questions to explore in small groups

If you're happy to share, discuss your thoughts and reflections on the preparatory questions above.

READING THE SCRIPTURES – with background information and reflections

Read together the Bible passages: Genesis 2: 4-25

Notice here that the name of God has changed (from chapter 1), which suggests to biblical scholars that it originated from a different source. God is referred to uniquely as ***Yahweh Elohim*** – the LORD God – a personal name, suggesting we are now seeing the Sovereign Creator as a **relational being**.

We are introduced to the first human (**verse 7**) – made from the dust of the earth and given life by the breath of God. His name is **Adam**, but this Hebrew word also more generally means 'human' or 'mankind'.

The first human was in need of a **companion**, so after creating every other animal, and presenting them for Adam to name them, God decides to make something closer in design: From the man came woman – not as an inferior or subordinate, but as a complementary being to help the man undertake the work. In this story, the work of humankind is not to dominate, but to serve the earth (not to be kings, but gardeners!) – see **verse 15**. (The name '**Eve**' does not come about until the next chapter – bestowed by Adam.)

There are two special trees in the middle of the garden (**verse 9**): a **Tree of Life** (suggesting that eternal life was not theirs by right), and a **Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil**. All of the other trees are for their pleasure and nutrition (**verse 16**). The fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (what we might perhaps call 'Wisdom') was forbidden. These things combined would have made them rather like God.

The location is **Eden**, which means 'delight' in Hebrew. We are given a cryptic description of its location (**verses 10-14**), perhaps somewhere in modern-day Iraq. The word Eden also means 'luxury', when to us it might seem like simplicity itself: They would serve the earth, and the earth would provide for all their needs.

They were naked, but not ashamed (**verse 25**). In the ancient world, the **shame** associated with nakedness was less to do with sex and more to do with poverty. It could simply mean their poverty didn't bother them!

DIGGING DEEPER – some questions for you to consider in your group:

*Do you prefer to think of humans 'ruling over' the earth (as in **chapter 1:28**) or working it and taking care of it (as in **2:15**)? Where can we see examples of both in our world today? What do you think is closer to our calling and God's intention? How does God allow Adam to share responsibility?*

Eve is created as a **companion and partner** for Adam, and there is more focus on gardening than sex in this passage! *How can partnership and companionship in all their forms be valued and encouraged? How can we value committed partnerships wherever they work for good?*

Verse 24 talks about the man and woman becoming '**one flesh**'. *Can you see the similarities between this original partnership, and St. Paul's vision of the church being '**one body**' (see **1 Corinthians 12**)? And how is this also mirrored in the relationship between Christ and his church?*

*Where for you is like **Eden** – a place of simplicity and delight? How can you visit there more often?*

What do you make of these stories of our human beginnings? How do they shape and inform our worship, or our view of life? What further questions do you have from this story?

PRAYING AND WORSHIPPING TOGETHER

Share a time of prayer together. Allow space for group members to offer their own prayers. Give thanks for the companions, friends and colleagues you have known. Perhaps take the opportunity to pray for those who are dealing with loneliness or bereavement at this time. **Hymns** to sing or use as prayers include: *Singing the Faith* **102**, **109**, **136**, **618**, **687** and **835** (**Psalm 139**). Share **The Lord's Prayer** together.

WHEN YOU'RE AT HOME…

Find a place of simplicity to be close to God in worship. Or spend some quality time gardening!

JUNIOR GOOD SOIL – ideas for children and young people

Read the story of **Genesis 2**. Make **clay models** of animals and give them names! Talk about how humans have different talents and gifts that can work together in harmony. Think about how Adam and Eve were first given the task of gardening and looking after the earth. Do a bit of **gardening**, or **plant a tree**!