

The Gardener's Spoils (East of Eden Series – Part IV)

2/22/2009

1. Read Gen. 1:26-30. Describe the relationship between God and man in this passage. What was man supposed to eat according to verse 29?

God creates man and makes him the manager of His creation on earth. Man was modeled in the image of God (v.27), so this was a very special creation. Note the use of the word “created” three times in v. 27. This was a special effort. According to v. 29, man is to eat fruit and seeds.

[Eating animals is first described in Gen. 9:1-3.]

2. Read Gen. 2:8-10, 15. How does this passage describe man's role?

He is to cultivate and maintain the garden. God did the creating and man is to tend it and benefit from the fruits of their joint labor.

3. Pastor Steve said we need to know our place and who we are. Once we do that, then our labor becomes our calling. Why does that change things?

When we understand our relationship with God and feel we are doing what He would like us to be doing, our labor no longer is work, but is more like worship. We do what we do because we love God and want to serve Him. This approaches the initial relationship between God and Adam. Note in Gen. 2:5-6 that God needed to send the rain AND He needed man to tend the garden. It was a team effort.

4. Pastor Steve then goes on to say that whenever we work along side God, we always produce fruit. Isn't that a bit over the top, or is it possible to always produce fruit?

If we are working in tandem with God, then our labors will always be fruitful. It might be that we are the ones learning and benefiting from the experience, or it might well be those to whom we are ministering. At times we won't see the results of our work. We are the ones who are preparing the soil and planting the seeds. Others will get to experience the harvest. In addition, the harvest may involve something other than what we were expecting. We might have thought that an activity was meant to win lost souls when God used it simply to bring a particular group of believers together who later would do something entirely different for Him.

5. Pastor Steve then made the connection to stewardship, suggesting that at the point we are producing all that fruit, stewardship becomes managing all that God has given us. How is that image of stewardship different from the one we normally think of within the context of church?

Normally stewardship at church means giving of our time, talents, and money to the church. We are told to be cheerful givers, but the picture is one of us living in our

individual worlds and needing to make choices about how much of “us” do we part with to give to the church. Living and working in a partnership with God is not usually part of the conversation. Further, this new image makes it clear that all we have is owned by God and that we are simply helping manage it for His purposes.

6. The image of being “stewards” was then contrasted with being “consumers”. Take a few minutes to think of words that describe a consumer and then write a similar list of words that describe a steward. Once you have the two lists, consider the implication that the two groups of words might have if applied to a person with whom you would have a close relationship.

There are lots of words that the group may throw out.

Stewards: responsible, caring, maintains, manager, generous, redirects, resourceful, guardian, accountable, purposeful, improves, keeps boundaries, knows who is boss.

Consumers: self-absorbed, materialistic, wasteful, user, taker, abusive, animal-like, hoarder, spender, indulgent,

The consumer sounds selfish in so many ways. There is no reason that we should trust him, since he only has in own best interests at heart. The steward sounds like someone who would be good to know and work with.

7. Pastor Steve closed with a description of four disciplines that would help us move away from being consumers and toward being stewards. What were they and how did each contribute to movement toward Godly stewardship?

a. Worship – re-establishes our relationship with God. We once again acknowledge that it’s His Universe and we are simply doing His calling. This may require that we get outside of the physical church building and experience God’s creation to remind us of all that He has made.

b. Rest – we need to take a Sabbath rest from time to time. This is a sacred time, not just a time of leisure, but a time of refreshment. We need to turn off the TV and telephones and meditate on who God is and the ways in which we have been blessed.

c. Self-control – we need to consciously get our lives in tune with what God would want for us. We tend to be indulgent, hoarding and stockpiling stuff, much of which we eventually waste. This doesn’t mean we have to adopt an ascetic lifestyle in which we attempt to exist with almost nothing, but it does mean that we might try to simplify our lives. Thus, stewardship becomes as much about what we don’t waste as about what we give.

d. Contentment – we need to come to the realization that for most of us, we have enough. Thus, we need to bless the stuff we have and be satisfied (and grateful). Our tendency toward envy and desires for more can be overwhelming, but can never be satisfied. We’ll always want more or bigger or better – unless we choose to be contented with what we have.

8. Read Psalm 8:1, 3-9. Does this describe a King David who has found contentment? If so, what has led him to that condition?

David realizes that he serves a great God, who has created an amazing place in which to live. It is a joy just to be able to have a relationship with God. That is enough. That He gave us all that we enjoy here on earth is just icing on the cake.