

# 1. The First Garden

**If you can, meet in a Garden. Spend a few minutes enjoying and exploring it, then find a comfortable, sheltered place to sit.**

## For discussion

Describe to the group an “Eden” you remember from childhood.

## The confluence

We call the place in our garden where the paths meet “The Confluence”. Like the meeting of many rivers or streams, the paths merge and flow together, before branching out to all the different places on our property: our house, courtyard, gardens, shed, and driveway. These paths represent essential aspects of our life. They meet, then separate, leading to shelter, security, food, health, blessings, our goings out and our comings in.

Most gardens are enjoyed for their beauty. Some have the bonus of a veggie plot. Few would consider a garden essential to security, food, health, and shelter. At our place all the available growing space is planted in fruiting trees, shrubs, vines, and canes, along with perennial and annual herbs and vegetables. While it is interlaced with flowers and decorative plants, it mainly grows food. This is a “productive garden”. The trees and plants are chosen because they will grow in our climate zone and produce their fruits to feed the household over the twelve months of the year. This provision means health and security, as there will always be fresh, nutritious food. Our house shelters us in the centre of the garden. Set here, the house becomes a home. Here, we raise our family, interact with our community, and walk and talk with God. The garden surrounds our home and encloses it in beauty. This is our little piece of the world to protect and care for, as it protects and cares for us.



## The Garden of Eden

In the Garden of Eden, we are given the perfect example of a home garden that is both beautiful and productive. It is a garden full of fruiting trees and plants, beautiful flowers, moving water, stirring insects, birds, and animals. Imagine Adam and Eve strolling among the beds, picking plums, and eating strawberries. They stop to pull a weed or transplant a seedling. They know joy and peace, and in the evening, they walk with God.

God is the gardener, and Eden is God's garden. It is planted by God for God's own pleasure. Here God provides the creatures God has made with fresh, nutritious food that is free of chemicals, poisons, preservatives, and packaging. There is a bountiful supply of it, so when Adam and Eve have children or get neighbours, there will be plenty for all. There is no rubbish or waste, for the garden will recycle all the scraps. There is no loss of topsoil or soil nutrients. There is no need for vehicles and machinery because this garden is big enough to provide for all their needs, and small enough to manage with simple tools. There are no "food miles", and even "buy local" is unnecessary. In fact, you do not have to buy anything at all; the fruit, plants, seeds, trees, compost, minerals, and fertilisers are God's gift. They are free. There is no reliance on energy grids or transport

grids or communication grids. The only dependence is on nature. Most of their food is ready to eat off the tree. There is no preparation or cooking time, though I'm sure they like to experiment. Adam and Eve are happily employed tending the garden, and because the garden is so abundant, they get to rest.

As we begin our Lenten studies with the Garden of Eden, we venture down streams or paths where we encounter another, greater, confluence. This confluence is the meeting, merging, and branching out of all God's creation. This confluence is the fundamental interconnectedness of all things—the flowing together of natural systems and cycles, of day and night, seasons and weather, of plants, beings and creatures, of water, land, and air. All of God's creation is one interconnected whole. It is called Earth, and God delights in it.

*Read Genesis 2:4–25*

## Reflections on the passage

Genesis contains two versions of the creation story. Genesis 1 tells the story from a cosmic perspective. It describes the ordering and separating of chaos and disorder, and

the bringing forth of the various living creatures that populate the earth. The land and creatures have their own life, identity, and purpose. Finally, humans are created in God's image. They are blessed and given creation as a gift. Creation is declared "very good", and God takes rest on the seventh day. Genesis 2 tells the story from an "on the ground" perspective. God plants a garden and the man and then the woman are placed within it, along with all God's creatures. The story moves from the larger, wider setting in chapter 1, to the immediacy and intimacy of domestic life and work in chapter 2. Eden is the place God creates for the man and the woman to call home. Eden is a garden. It is the place where the man and the woman live out their vocation as gardeners. In this they show they are made in God's image, as God is the first gardener.

Genesis 2:4-6 describes the unrealised potential of the land. Then Adam is created (7). Following that, "the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man he had formed" (8). God makes trees to grow in the garden, "every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food", along with the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (9). We then read about the river that flows from the garden and waters it, before dividing into four and flowing beyond the garden. Eden is a small place in a large world. The rivers form its

boundaries (10-14).

The narrator then returns to the placing of Adam in the garden. What Adam can and cannot do are spelled out. Adam's job is to care for and protect the garden. He may freely eat of every tree of the garden, but not of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, or he shall die (15-17). Then God creates the creatures of the field and the birds of the air, bringing them to the man to name (18-20). Sensing that the man lacks "a helper as his partner", the Lord makes the woman and brings her to the man. The man rejoices that a partner who is compatible with him, and complimentary to him, has been formed for him. Joined in marriage they experience solidarity and become "one flesh". They face each other as equals and without shame (21-25).

As a place, the Garden of Eden is the confluence of rivers. As a setting, it is where many things find their source and are held together: provision, work, fellowship, community, worship, care, natural cycles, instruction, and choice. The garden is God's comprehensive provision for all creatures.

From these two creation stories we can draw some important conclusions. First, humans do not have a day





of creation to themselves. Note that in Genesis 1:24–31 humans share the sixth day with other land creatures. We are created in the same manner as other creatures, and we share the same breath of life. God saw that creation was good before humanity came on the scene. Nevertheless, humans are given a unique and specific role. Humans are made in God’s image to act as God’s representatives or delegates on earth. To have “dominion” is to care for and protect as God would. The garden is a place of wholeness, and humans are a part of that whole. All creatures are interconnected with all of creation.

Adam and Eve are created male and female. Marriage, household, and community flow from this (2:24). They are given work to do (15). This is not a consequence of sin. It is part of life in the garden. The work is easy, and the burden is light, with provision so plentiful it allows for rest. Genesis 2 describes the life God intends for us. This life is found in the Garden. God is the original gardener, and we are to bear the Gardener’s image. Gardening is the first human vocation. It is the most natural human activity.

Because God formed and made the earth and its creatures, all creation is holy. Eden was a sacred place within a larger world. It was God’s habit to walk there and to meet with the man and the woman. God would speak with them and commune with them there (3:8). It was a meeting of heaven and earth. This communion between God and creation is God’s purpose for the world.

Finally, God loves creation and delights in it. God gifts the abundance of the garden to all creatures, who accept it as God’s blessing. God wants us to respond to this love by loving God in return. God wants to walk and talk with us in the garden. To set the boundaries for this relationship to work, God instructs the man not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, or he shall die (2:17). God gives him the choice of life or death. Keeping the

instructions in Eden was not a way for Adam and Eve to start a relationship with God or to enter the garden. God had already planted the garden and placed them there. Rather, keeping the commands was a way of maintaining their relationship with God and enjoying the blessings they had been offered. We choose life by loving God as God loves us: freely, generously, and without compulsion. God placed us in the Garden for a reason. It is here that we find and live the life God intended.

## Questions

- **How might your life change if you spent it in a garden that was productive as well as beautiful?**
- **If God is a gardener and gardening is the original human vocation, what does that mean for our lives as Christians?**
- **Our Ash Wednesday liturgy connects us to the story of Eden (Gen 2:7) when we say “remember, O mortal that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” What does this say to us about humility, dignity, hope and purpose?**

## Prayer

**Creator God,  
you planted a garden in Eden  
and placed us there to care for it and protect it.  
In doing so you offered us full life, meaningful work,  
and a secure home.  
Keep us faithful to this task and grateful for  
your provision.  
Amen.**

*A note for next time: bring something edible to share that you or a friend have grown.*