

Keeping Going In Faith

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[0 : 00] Father, we thank you that we are dust. We're no more than dust, but you place us in paradise. You place us in a place where we can know you intimately as our heavenly Father.

You bring us into relationship with you. You call us to serve you, to work for you, to care for the land. You call us to obedience, that we might flourish and grow and thrive and prosper.

Father, please help us to remind, dwell on these things tonight. Please remind us of where we were and where you have brought us to. In Jesus' name, amen.

Well, good evening. My name's James. I'm on staff team here. I've just got married. Woo-hoo! So Sarah's here. Do chat to her afterwards. So if I'm a bit rusty tonight, please be kind.

Right, great. And our question for tonight is, how do we flourish as people? How do we live the good life? How do we live our best life now? I don't know what the latest tagline on Instagram or whatever that is.

[1 : 13] And that's the thing that we're going to consider tonight. What's the one thing that we need to change in our lives if we are going to flourish, if we're going to grow as people and live the best lives we can?

What would your mates say at university and the sports clubs around you? Well, here are a couple of answers that I thought about this week, that if you're going to flourish, if you're going to succeed, and this is probably a good one for Glasgow, is that you must live in the moment.

You must seize every moment. You must climb every Monroe, every Corbett. You must say yes to more stuff in life. And then when you do that, then you'll be happier and more fulfilled.

And then I will flourish. Or you might say, the way to flourish is if I'm more true to myself, if I don't hinder myself in any way, if I just live out every thought or inclination in my life, then I'll be happy.

If I disregard what others think, then I'll flourish. If I live entirely in a way that brings joy to my heart, then I'll be fulfilled and happier.

[2 : 26] Well, maybe you might think, the way to flourish is if I just try and make some changes in my life, if I just adjust the way I live, if I drink cider vinegar each morning, whatever the latest fad is, if I'm only vegetarian, then I will succeed, then I will flourish in life, and I'll be living my best life, and my life will be meaningful.

And while there are some wisdom in those suggestions there, what we're going to see tonight is we're going to consider the secret of how we can really flourish as people. And what we're going to see is that people flourish when they live their lives dependent on God, and when they live in God's presence and they live in obedience to God.

So it will be a big help as we go through this passage tonight. If you keep your Bibles open, and then those points will be on the sheet for us just to follow those. So in short, what this passage is teaching us, that people flourish when they live in relationship with God, and they wither when they abandon God, when they walk away from God.

That's when people wither. If you've just joined us for the very first time tonight, a big warm welcome to you. We've been going through the first chapters of Genesis in a series entitled The First Chapters of Everything.

And we're looking at Genesis 1-4, and we're really getting God's view on how to live life well. And what we've seen so far is we've considered who God is. And so the author Moses has told us who God is, that He's the Creator.

[4 : 01] Then He's told us about the world that God has made, and how wonderful it's been, and how He made it. And then He spoke to us about who we are in the world, and He talked us through who we are.

And now tonight, we're going to consider how it is that we live in relationship with God. So how who we are meets who God is.

Just before we dive in properly, let's address a couple of issues. The first is that the temptation is for us, as we sat in our seats tonight, we heard that read, we thought, well, isn't this just all make-believe?

Isn't this a fairy tale? Well, this passage is recording real historical events. Jesus and the New Testament speak of man, the man created here, as a real person.

And he speaks of this section as a historical event. But just notice there, it's history, but it's written poetically in a literary style.

[5 : 05] It's history that's concerned with not recording all the details, but with making a point so that we can understand the big thing that we need to know. It's not going to be perfectly objective as we might think we'd like history.

No history ever is. The history students will tell us that. They know that good. And then the second issue that we're going to look at is we're going to read how God created man.

And the eagle-eyed amongst us would have noticed, well, we've already covered this in chapter one. Did any of you spot that? Why are we covering this again? And the reason for that is in chapter one, he spoke of man being created in big terms, in the place of the world.

But here, Moses is going to focus on our privileged position in the world and being in relationship with God. And then later on, what we're going to see over the coming Eats is this is the beginning of a section where he's talking about how good life was and how it's going to go from being very good to very bad.

And so his other big point is what's gone wrong with the world. And we're going to look at that in coming evenings. So the first thing to understand about human flourishing is that people flourish when they live in dependence on God, when they live dependent on God.

[6 : 28] Look at verses four to seven there. And the key verse there is verse seven. Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

And the man became a living being. And so, at verse five, we see that God calls his creation very good. But in his good creation, there's a problem in that there was no one to work the ground.

And because there's no one to work the ground, cultivate it, God won't send rain on the earth to make the earth flourish. And to resolve the problem, God forms a man from the dust of the ground to work the ground.

And it's an incredibly intimate picture. And Moses is focusing on our relationship to our maker here. It's up close and personal. God, like a potter, he picks up a pile of dirt from the ground and he shapes it, shapes the man from dust.

And you can imagine he maybe cups the man in his hands and he breathes life into the man, into his nostrils. And then the man, he may have coughed or something like that and then opened his eyes and suddenly he was alive for the very first time.

[7 : 43] The man goes from being dust, inanimate, nothing to being a living being. And his entire existence is dependent on God.

So chapter one, we saw how we are made in God's image and that gives people dignity. And here we see an intimate picture of a creature in relation to his creator, of how we have been made by God for a purpose to cultivate and care for the earth and the ground.

And it's completely miraculous. It's a miracle that this dust comes to life, breathes, and is called to work for God. And I think it's a miracle even today, the medics might be able to correct me on this, that no one can understand why human hearts start beating for the first time.

That's a complete miracle. Science can't tell us why it does. And the medics could probably correct me. I'm not a brilliant, I'm not a medic, I don't know. But I think that's right. Just notice it, the man is, he's also made from the physical realm.

He's from dust and to dust he will return. He'll go back to dust. And people are made from dust, from the created realm. And our bodies are subject to that.

[9 : 06] And that's intentional because the author wants us to see that we are created, that we're part of this world. We're not of the uncreated world. We're not part of God's world.

We're part of this world. And very often we try to live as we are part of that uncreated realm. We don't see ourselves as having limitations.

We think, if we dream it, we can do it. And we don't recognize that we are created and creatures merely of dust. That our bodies are of dust.

And Simon's going to unpack that more for us later in Roots Plus this evening. And the point that Genesis makes is that we have been created from dust intimately by God as a part of his creation. And we are entirely dependent on God for our very existence. So if we're ever going to flourish, then we have to acknowledge our utter dependence of God.

[10:06] We need to come to him and trust in God for our existence. acknowledging that and saying thank you to him for that. The next thing that we see is that people flourish when they live in God's presence.

Verses 8 to 15. So people flourish when they see their existence as dependent on God. But the next thing we see is that people flourish when they live in God's presence.

And the key verses there are verses 8, 9, and 15. So 8, Now the Lord God had planted the garden in the east, in Eden, and there he put the man he had formed.

And then verse 9, The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground, trees that were pleasing for the eye and good for food. And in the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

And then verse 15, And the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work and to care for it. And it's perhaps not immediately obvious, but the thing that makes the garden which is in the land of Eden so remarkable is it's the place where God is, where the man will meet God.

[11:20] So what I mean is that Moses, the author, he writes here of the creation account of the garden, but in the next book of the Bible, in Exodus, he's going to write of the creation account of the tabernacle, the place where God meets.

And in the middle of the tabernacle was a room that was dressed and looked exactly like a garden, the Holy of Holies. And he uses this, he uses the image of the Garden of Eden as a picture of that place, of the Holy of Holies, the place where man meets with his Creator.

So just notice very quickly there, the earth is watered from a river and the river flows through Eden and then it comes from Eden and it splits and it flows to the four corners of the earth and feeds and nourishes all the earth.

And in those times in ancient civilizations, gods were seen pictured sitting on a throne from where water would flow. If you control water, you control life.

And then notice we see later in Exodus that the garden is, the Holy of Holies is described like a garden.

[12:37] So there's pomegranates in it and it's decorated as a garden and there's a tree in it. Remember the seven-branched lampstand that was just outside the Holy of Holies, a tree like we see here.

And then finally in verse 15 we read how the man is put in the garden, what to work and to care for it. And the words work or care and for care we could use the word God there are used more in the context of religious or spiritual work we might say of cultivating and maintaining a relationship with God.

So sometimes we talk about the work of prayer or we talk about building up a spiritual sweat working hard or we talk of guarding our hearts.

maybe you've used that phrase before and that's the language that is being used here. That's what he means when he says the man was put in the garden to work and care for it.

He was to guard his heart so that he could dwell in God's presence. He was to guard it from all the things that might draw him away from God.

[13:47] And the picture of the garden that we get is one of super abundance and flourishing. The word garden comes from the word paradise because that's what it's like when we live in God's presence.

It's like living in a perfect paradise. And so the islanders here would who the islanders couple of islanders there's not many trees in the islands are they?

Are they beautiful? Not many trees but in the garden it's beautiful there's tons of trees. Growing up in Natal you've got wonderful trees and I went to North Natal once and you get these beautiful raffia palms they're 100 foot high and they interlock the branches and they form like a natural cathedral and they're incredibly beautiful and there's tons of fruits around and it's like a paradise.

Lychies and avocados and bananas and every kind of fruit you can imagine and that's what this garden was like. It was incredibly abundant with everything you could ever want. It looked spectacular. It felt spectacular. It was filled with yummy things to eat. But look verse 11 and 12 it's also filled with gold. That's good.

[15 : 04] And aromatic resin and onyx that's precious stones there. It's a land of wealth and prosperity. It was filled with good things. Everything they wanted was there.

It was a land and that's what it's like to live in God's presence. It's a place of prosperity. It's incredibly good.

The great lie that we're told and that we're led to believe is that it is not good to live in God's presence. That's what the world and that's what our friends that's what newspapers and adverts and internet will tell us.

It's not good to live in God's presence. that if we live in God's way in his presence in relationship with him then we will not flourish. But Genesis says if we trust in God if we live in God's presence we will flourish as people.

And while we can't go back to the Garden of Eden and we can't go back to the temple we can enjoy intimate relationship with God in God's presence through his son Jesus who is the living temple and who we are called to be a part as we trust and believe in Jesus we are brought into deepest relationship with God and we can flourish and grow in complete confidence not meaning everything will be perfect in life but we'll be in a place of flourishing we'll be in perfect relationship with our heavenly creator.

[16 : 43] And so Genesis teaches us that we've been created by God with great care and love we've been given life by God by his breath we've been given access to God's presence and the New Testament the rest of the Bible spells out how we get that through Jesus and that the way for us to flourish as people is to see that we are dependent on God and that we are to live in God's presence that we are to seek him out and delight in him and that's how we flourish just notice there we've got a reference to the tree of life there very quickly it's not like a holy grail one bites and you live forever that's not the intention of the author there but it's perhaps as you eat it so you rejuvenate it so you stay young forever but it's also about living in a way that's wise as we live in God's presence so we discern a way of living wisely so just listen to Proverbs 318 she that's wisdom there is a tree of life to those who take hold of her those who hold fast will be blessed so as we stick with

God stick with his wisdom so that's refreshing to us the final thing that we see in this passage is that people flourish when they live in obedience to God people flourish when they are obedient to God our key verse is verse 16 and 17 and the Lord God commanded the man you are free to eat from any tree in the garden but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for when you eat of it you will certainly die so just notice there notice the context that this instruction comes in it's the instruction of a creator who is caring and loves his creation intimately it's in the context of intimate relationships so in Genesis 1 God is simply called God but here in Genesis 2 it's the Lord God and that L-O-R-D that's God's special name for himself that he tells his friends that's unpacked for us more in Exodus of a special covenant relationship of a sure and certain promise that's the relationship here that this promise that this instruction is given in it's in the context of superabundance everything the man wanted was in the garden nothing was lacking even then some even more everything he wanted and it's in the context of overwhelming freedom and self expression you're free to eat whatever you want in the garden just don't touch that tree anything else you want you can have it's yours

I'm even here with you you can speak to me you can know me as your creator then notice the type of command it is it's emphatic just you must not eat it's not a take it or leave it command you must not eat it's emphatic and then you will certainly die you will definitely die die if you touch that tree and it's not certainly die it's not you'll die immediately but it's absolutely inevitable that if you touch that tree you will die and just notice the manner of death there we're not going to speak about the tree of good and evil tonight we'll speak about that in coming evenings but just to highlight God's not going to strike them down immediately as they touch the apple but they will be cut off from God's presence from the tree of life and as they have disregarded God's word so they'll be cut off from God forever and so in that way they will die they have rejected

God what we'll see and God will honor their choice and their rejection of him if they break this command to touch that tree well just as we come into land here what we see in this passage is the

secret of flourishing as people well how do I know that it's the secret maybe you're sitting here tonight and you're wondering how do I know that James is speaking the truth here how do I know that this really is the secret of flourishing well there's two ways that you can know the one is to look at your friends who take these promises seriously see the outcome of their life see how they're doing see if their life is flourishing how they handle stress how they handle disappointments how they handle sadness the other way is perhaps is to try it for yourself to take these promises seriously to look to live in God's presence through his son to seek to obey him to see your life as utterly dependent on him try it for yourself and then judge afterwards if it's true or not that the way to flourish in this life is to live in dependence in God in relationship with him and our passage tonight is as relevant to us tonight as it was to them then who heard this passage the very first hearers years and years and years ago so how will you flourish how will you prosper maybe you're starting a new course of life at the moment you're a new student you've just started out maybe you are starting a new academic year maybe you're starting your first job maybe you're starting a new job maybe you're starting in retirement maybe you're starting in marriage or as a parent or starting out in adulthood or being an adult how are you going to flourish in that new start or what we see in our passage tonight is that the secret of flourishing despite that everything that the world tells us around us is that we have been we flourish when we see that we are created by intimate caring God who's breathed life into us who's taken dust and made it alive we see that we flourish when we live in God's presence when we see that we've been given this great gift of being able to know God and we know him perfectly through his son when we come to God daily in our faltering ways we might not do it perfectly but we come simply saying God I'm fallen I'm dust but won't you reveal yourself to me I love you won't you show me yourself in your son how do we flourish or finally we flourish as we seek to live our lives obedient to him day by day when we take what he says in his word in the Bible in the scriptures seriously when we learn to live his way and so we gain wisdom on how to flourish in life and live well and succeed in whatever the new thing is that we're starting wherever we are let let let me close in a word of prayer for us so father we've got many ways around us that draw us away from you that seek to make us dependent on other things but not dependent on you that seek to promise flourishing outside of you that promise freedom outside of you help us to reject those father and see that the only way that we can ever truly flourish is if we come to you and seek you out daily if we come to you in relationship day by day if we trust all that you have said you will do for us in your son

[24 : 46] Jesus Amen