

Glory Work

Every inch out after every inch in

Mountains would move as he walked with Him

What a blessed assignment to which He called Man—to escort His glory into every inch of Creation. But what a task so far beyond Man’s capability! This is the point.

To extend Eden’s borders necessitated reliance upon God. Eden depicts the perfect blend of material and spiritual. A cultivated garden—the material—where He would walk with Man—the spiritual. From this place of physical and spiritual provision, Man was to cultivate the rest of Earth—as God had cultivated Eden. Like a father who having begun a nail, brings it to a place where his child can finish “the job”—so God began with cultivating Eden. He, then, handed Man the hammer.

It’s crucial, however, to recognize the designed paradigm of spiritual working in tandem with material. “Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain....” (Psa 127:1-2 ESV). As Man’s roots grew deep in God he would be properly poised to extend Eden’s shade far and wide. Every developed inch out followed after a deeper inch in.

This process becomes apparent with a small, but significant, detail which the Narrator provides as he records Man’s placement within Eden, itself. “The LORD God took the man and put [rested] him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it” (Genesis 2:15 ESV). Interestingly, God has already told Adam to fill the earth and multiply, to dominate and subdue the earth. But now, He “rests” him in the Garden Temple. The subtle point is this: Man was meant to subdue and dominate from within the realm of rest—in God. This foundational truth has already been laid in understanding the significance of Day 7, but here, it is expanded. Man is strongest when he’s resting in God’s strength.

Imagine for a moment Adam looking upon the vast landscape before him with the recognition that it was his role to conquer, subdue, and cultivate it. How incredibly intimidating this would have been! And yet, this is precisely where God wanted him, for His power is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). “For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, ‘In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength’” (Isaiah 30:15 ESV).

From this place of weakness God would begin to go before him. Adam would be called upon to name the animals. This in-depth process of studying and classifying the animal kingdom would, in addition to introducing him to his eventual teammates, make Adam keenly aware that an actual part of his body was missing: Woman. God would soon resolve this deficit, not only giving Adam a companion and helper like no other, but further provide them the capacity to actually multiply! Untold numbers of Image Bearers to assist them in their glory work with the Animal Kingdom at their side. In a most profound way, Adam would begin seeing how God would carry the day in completing the task he’d been given.

It is here that Adam may have begun to see God’s magisterial plan unfold, and the massive amount of work before him begin to seem more and more realizable. The Animal Kingdom, which is clearly utilizable as seen in the Flood Narrative where they willingly board the ark, would have been a massive resource in the work given Man. Woman, as Man’s counterpart, makes complete that which was once half. The Tree of Life, allowing Man to live forever putting no time limit on the job. And finally, the ability for the animal kingdom and humanity to multiply makes the job wholly feasible. Unfortunately, the harmony envisioned here, in every unique category, would be devastated by sin’s entrance into the world.

With sin, each harmony becomes a soliloquy. Humanity’s and the Animal Kingdom’s relationship becomes typified by Eve’s and the Serpent’s seed and the animal whose skin they would soon wear. Man and woman turn on each other and will now experience permanent struggle. Humanity’s relationship with The Tree of Life gets severed. And there will now be great pain in child labor—which may indicate further pain into childrearing. Apart from all this, the land itself, which watered the ground and was filled with vast and precious resources, was turned against them.

This sadness must not blur the ultimate point however: God envisioned a future that He made possible, despite all odds. His power would overcome their individual weakness. The lesson with which Man was meant to walk away is simple: “What is impossible with man is possible with God” (Luke 18:27 ESV). The glory work of extending the Garden Temple throughout the earth began and ended, first and last, with God and Man’s relationship. Every inch out, after every inch in. Man’s role was to grow deep in Him so that His blessed borders could grow far and wide in and through us. “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8 ESV). Similarly, Jesus will tell the Disciples to wait for Him to meet them before they partake in any kingdom work. And so it is that our role, now, is to “...work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in [us], both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13 ESV).