
Becoming Christlike – Learning How from Old Testament Kings and Prophets

Session 16 – Eden or Eden Prairie

Human Beings Want Eden

Human beings after the fall (unknowingly) are trying to get back to Eden. They desire the contentment, comfort, safety, provision, tranquility, beauty, and relationship with God that had been Adam and Eve's when in the garden of Eden.

The fullness of recapturing Eden can't be had until Revelation 21:22 when God puts in place the new heaven and earth.

Understanding this as a lens through which to view life, history, ourselves, others around us and the characters in the Word is enlightening and should be encouraging. All of history will make more sense to us.

If we really grasp this, the sacrifices or cost involved in being a genuine disciple will be more palatable, it will be easier to be motivated to do what is required.

Christ said:

Forsake all and follow me

Deny SELF and follow me. (SELF wants Eden and will do anything to get it including lawlessness)

Take up your cross and follow me. (cross is an implement of death, we are to crucify our desires)

Recall the story of the rich young ruler who was told to sell all he had, give it to the poor and follow Christ and at that time he just could not do it. (Perhaps after the resurrection and Day of Pentecost he reconsidered.)

In the lives of the kings we will see their inclinations toward and provision for SELF. We see in the old testament that they couldn't really overcome those inclinations.

In the Book of Acts we see individuals who did overcome those inclinations. We want to understand why so that we can have the same type of transformation, power, and fruit that they had in the first century church.

In the summer of 1974 Michael took a class titled "The First Century Church in The Twentieth". It looked at the Book of Acts, what the first century believers did, and why they were so successful at spreading the Gospel with signs, miracles, and wonders. They operated the 9 manifestation of holy spirit; they manifested the fruit of the spirit. He saw what it took to be genuine disciples and what it took in terms of applying the church epistles. Ever since he has been on a quest to see how that can happen again and why we don't see it in the church today.

This quest led him to study human nature, nurture, genes, up-bringing, counseling, and many other topics over the years.

He has come to an understanding that at the root, we all want what Eden had provided to man when he placed him in the garden. Man is trying to recapture it but without "God within" and "God without" it is impossible. Man tries every other means to fill the void within himself.

God has provided a supernatural solution to the dilemma. The supernatural solution will provide the restoration of what God wants for human beings.

In the Garden there was Total Contentment

We are going to consider an example of just one thing man enjoyed in Eden: Total Contentment. Adam and Eve enjoyed total contentment with every need supplied in abundance. Since the fall instead of total contentment man has anxiety, fear, trepidation, threats.

People try desperately to get that contentment back via mindfulness, yoga, meditation. We are immersed in the world, and we need supernatural assistance in order to have contentment now and that full contentment won't be established until we reach the end.

We will build a real-life example by looking at three groups of people striving for the total contentment that Eden provided.

1 - Migrants Seek Contentment

Migrants in the Middle East desire to leave where they are from and get into western Europe. Migrants in South America, Mexico and elsewhere want to get into the United States.

They see that in their own countries they have no shot at a better life. They don't have the peace, prosperity, comfort, security that they see others having. They want it. Of course they want it, why wouldn't they? So they take great risks to make their way to their desired destination. They are seeking Eden, whether they know it or not. They are willing to break the law. That isn't important to them. They are a law unto themselves. They are going to do what they need to do to get what they want for SELF. They risk being trafficked, being killed, or raped, abused, or having their children taken from them. There are even drug smugglers, terrorists involved. They take these great risks.

2 - Ranchers on The Border Seek Contentment

Ranchers on the southern border of the United States have spent their lives working hard to build an Edenic situation for themselves. They have land and prosperity. It is peaceful and quiet. It is safe and secure. But it is being disrupted by this invasion of migrants passing through, including thieves, terrorists, drug smugglers, addicted people, people who are sick bringing covid and other diseases. They are making a mess, leaving behind all sorts of trash, drug paraphernalia and worse. They want these illegal crossings and trespassing on their land to stop. They want their way of life back!

3 - Very Wealthy Americans Seek Contentment

Very wealthy americans (or in any country) have one or more fine homes. They have peace, prosperity, food, and drink. They surround themselves with art and beauty. They can travel where they want, eat in the best restaurants, and enjoy a luxurios lifestyle. They have their various hobbies and entertainment, games, and sports. They choose to spend their time enjoying all this rather than serving in a mission or evangelizing, or prayer, or study. They want

to maximize enjoyment during their time on earth. People sometimes ask, "What is wrong with that; they have earned it?" We will consider that question a bit later.

What are Their Outcomes?

Migrants – The migrants arrive, it takes time and hardwork but eventually they elevate themselves to a place where they have peace, prosperity and relative safety but they ask, "Is this all there is?" They are still empty inside.

Ranchers – The ranchers clean up, develop stronger security and protection to keep people out and restore everything as it was before the invasion but afterward, they are left with the nagging question of "Is this all there is?"

Wealthy – While the list is longer of examples of all they have, they essentially have all they could possibly want or need but they are still confronted with the same emptiness and the question, "Is that all there is?"

Michael recently had 3 things happen that underscored the reality that people seek to return to Eden.

1. In riding his bike around town he had watched a new home being built. When it was finished the owners placed a yard sign that said, "Paradise Found!" Which of course brought to mind the John Milton Poem "Paradise Lost" which of course recounts the Adam and Eve story.
2. At the community center he was chatting with some newcomers to the Verdis who said they had travelled the world and lived in many places, but they commented that "This is about as close to perfection/ paradise as it gets".
3. About 10 years ago and at a new-members church event a couple was there all wide-eyed and excited about their new life in the community that they had planned and dreamed about for many years. Unfortunately within the first year one of them got sick and was diagnosed with cancer. Year after year one challenge after another came their way and they never got to enjoy their new lives as they had hoped.

Unfortunately that is the reality of life in this fallen world and of putting all your eggs in the "this life basket"! The Word seeks to get us to look forward to eternity. If you read the gospels Christ is continually saying, "its not about YOU, it's not about NOW, it's about God and eternity and looking forward to eternity. Because that is for our own good. We may think we are going to create paradise on earth, BUT IT IS NOT!

Think about the tragedy after tragedy that you hear among even the wealthiest people. Daughter/divorce, Grandson/drugs, etc. This is not and cannot ever be Eden. This is life in a fallen world with fallen people.

God's Alternative

Here we are East of Eden and waiting for the Lord to return

We should focus on what to do now that will last for eternity and maximize our time in eternity.

All God promises WILL COME TO PASS! Just as everything he promised in the past has.

There are so many characters in scripture who forsook all and followed because they believed that!

Hebrews 11 – read about all of those mentioned. They were looking to eternity and will be rewarded there.

Abraham

Hebrews 11:10

[10](#) For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Not a city on earth! Not any place on earth with fallen people.

Moses

Hebrews 11:24-26

[24](#) By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, [25](#) choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. [26](#) He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, **for he was looking to the reward.**

Christ hadn't even come yet but he was looking to rewards, we can do the same thing.

Eden Prairie MN

Thinking of people in our example groups seeking Eden. There are whole communities that are doing this!

12 miles SW of Minneapolis there is a town called Eden Prairie. It is by all accounts a great place to live. It has been featured as one of the best places to live in the US. For the 10th year in a row it has been named as a top workplaces in MN. In reading their Newsletter there are many wonderful features in existence and more in the planning stages.

But it is populated by people with their human nature, inclined toward self and sin. There will be issues that arise divorce, crime, addictions, sickness, worry, anxiety. All that happens in a fallen world, People are going to live to 70-80-90 and they are still going to die.

And then eternity, and the real Eden that we should be living for is coming up.

Peter at the end of his life declared and asked what sort of people ought we to be in light of eternity?

2 Peter 3:11-13

[11](#) Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, **what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness,** [12](#) waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! [13](#) But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Our inclinations are toward SELF and NOW, but we should be living for GOD and ETERNITY!

The Wealthy – What’s Wrong With My Life of Luxury That I Have Worked For?

I had said I would get back to the question of “What is wrong with enjoying my wealth and luxury that I have worked for and earned? I am not hurting anyone!”

My response from the scriptures to that question is “What is right with that?” Who are you helping with that? What help is that from a spiritual perspective? It is not going to produce spiritual fruit.

As Christ said in John 15

John 15:4,5

4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. **5** I am the vine; you are the branches.

Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for **apart from me you can do nothing.**

We can totally understand people wanting to experience their little “slice of Eden” now, but that is not going to produce any spiritual fruit.

In order to produce spiritual fruit, we need to do it God’s way. God’s stipulation in the gospels and in the church epistles is to live IN CHRIST, not in the world.

We are to live for eternity. Any human being who is a believer and genuinely seeking God is going to arrive on the same place. Just as all pilots out at sea seeking the aircraft carrier are going to land in the same place.

Christian Authors Land in the Same Place Concerning Living for Eternity

Book: Enough About Me: Find Lasting Joy in the Age of Self, Jen Oshman

<https://www.jenoshman.com/book>

On page 70 she speaks of deifying the self and urges that rather we need to be rooted in Christ, and in the gospel like a Banyan tree that has far reaching roots and can withstand the worst of storms.

Book: Even Better Than Eden

Nine Ways the Bible’s Story Changes Everything about Your Story, Nancy Guthrie

<https://www.nancyguthrie.com/even-better-than-eden>

From the Jacket: “Sometimes the Bible’s story is summarized as creation, fall, redemption, restoration. But the future is not headed toward merely a restoration of Eden’s goodness. From the very beginning, the Bible’s story has always been headed toward consummation, toward glory. This book traces nine themes that run from Genesis to Revelation in the Bible. Each reveals how God’s plan for the new creation will be far more glorious than the original”

Larry Crabb who recently died was a pioneer in the field of Christian counseling. He declared that to really help people counselors need to counsel from scripture. He wrote many great and life-changing books: Inside Out, Finding God, The Silence of Adam

Book: Waiting for Heaven: Freedom from the Incurable Addiction to Self, Larry Crabb

This link leads to all his books

https://www.amazon.com/s?k=larry+crabb&i=stripbooks&adgrpid=1345803476585118&hvadid=84112913810851&hvbmmt=be&hvdev=c&hvlocphy=58993&hvnetw=o&hvqmt=e&hvtargid=kwid-84113553218665%3Aloc-190&hydadcr=8230_13501976&tag=mh0b-20&ref=pd_sl_bb690795m_e

Page 7 says

“I want now in this life what God only promises for later in the next life. I am aware that when Jesus returns He will make all things new, but couldn’t he straighten out a few more things before then?”

We want an Edenic existence now. He learned from all his years, God promised it for later, in the next life.

Amongst much else I want an experience in this life that shuts out all the stress brought on by difficulties that numbs all my insecurity, that pleasantly weakens my awareness of failure. Peter told them to not let relief become their goal, instead he warmly encourages those hard-pressed believers in God’s goodness to put their fully on the grace that will be brought to them not in this life but at the revelation of Jesus Christ” I Peter 1:13.

Waiting on God’s timetable, frustrating though it may be, will free us to live a good life now marked by increasingly consistent self-denial and self-denying other-centeredness an always deepening appreciation of forgiveness no matter how caught up in providing for our own good feelings and our own ecstatic but shallow temporary pleasure.

Larry Crabb’s Three Categories of Christians

Committed Christians – sold out, living for God, pleasing God, and living for eternity, realizing that just as Christ endured the suffering at the time because he was looking forward to the joy that would come. That actually comes right after Hebrews 11 where it talks about all those faithful ones who are awaiting the kingdom to come

Hebrews 12: 1-3

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **2** looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted

So that is the first category of Christians: living a self-sacrificial life in expectation of what is to come.

This is not to point fingers or be critical because ALL of us have a nature that is inclined toward ME and satisfaction NOW and it is a daily challenge to stay rooted and grounded in the Word. How do I stay immersed in God in the midst of this world around us? It is a constant daily challenge.

We want to be able to say what Paul said at the end of his life:

2 Timothy 4:7

7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. **8** Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

All the great men and women of God who sacrificed the pleasures of this life did so because they knew in the depth of their hearts what was to come.

Casual Christians – Too many Christians fit into this second category. Most longing to belong to category 1 they battle against a favorite passion, a strong temptation to indulge a certain yearning that when indulged reliably creates deep in their soul unique pleasure, a satisfaction that they experience as both strangely foreign yet wonderfully freeing and intimate, but intimate with only themselves. This delightful experience stirs up pleasure that nothing else can stir up as well, however it is temporary. This sensation somehow feels complete blocking out pressing fears, unpleasant thoughts, disturbing emotions that too often unsettle the casual Christian. No other legitimate pleasure, no tasty meal, no grand vacation, no high spirits felt when they buy their dream house or new car can so effectively and reliably do the same. These people are Christians like committed Christians when their choice temptation assails them they often and sometimes desperately bring Christ's death to mind and feel sincere gratitude for the grace and forgiveness. They genuinely believe that Christ's spirit is alive in them, but they feel little of his presence. They don't sense the inner stirring to please the father, resisting the temptation. **Avoiding pain and enjoying pleasures have become more compelling.**

(That is what we all have to deal with.)

They feel gratitude for what Christ has done. They know the spirit is nudging them in a good direction and the anticipated joys of Christ's coming but together they don't measure up to the settled illusion of peaceful wholeness they feel when the temptation is indulged.

(It feels good to satisfy the flesh! You see that?)

They inevitably find themselves arranging for the predictably reliable satisfaction available on demand. They are frustrated with themselves, "Why do I lack self-control?" And frustrated with life, "Life always throws me a curve, pressure mounts and relief seems necessary", and frustration with God, "Shouldn't He be doing more to help me?"

Complacent Christians – This is the most dangerous of the three categories. Those who belong in this category have convinced themselves that they are truly committed to Christ, living comfortably committed to Christianity as they understand it. They remain unaware that they live in self-protection for their self-enhancement. "I want to feel safe, and I want to feel good."

Their wish is granted, and they praise God for His faithfulness in providing the blessings and granting their wish. Life is working! Relatively happy marriage, wonderful kids, happily content in life, enough money to live well,

Many in this category have a ministry that enables them to display their talent and resources. A good number of them often attend conferences with notable Christian leaders whose teaching they believe they are following. Some are even pastors. When worship music in a conference or

in church directs their thoughts to the Lord's love, so fully revealed at calvary these Christians experience what they think is joy, but without recognizing the smug attitude beneath their pleasant emotions. In their minds a rarely acknowledged belief is strengthened. "Jesus died not only to forgive their sins **but also to now show favor to his forgiven followers by blessing them with whatever they need to enjoy life NOW.** And blessings that bring a comfortable life are valued above the blessing that brings forgiveness and the ability to love others at great cost to themselves.

The divine voice within that calls them to wait, and as they wait to place priority on spiritual growth and on spiritually blessing others is drowned out **by a louder voice that assures them they are entitled to life's blessings, blessings that free them to live the good life.** This understanding of the pattern of God's blessings is more evidence of a deceptive and entrenched addiction to self.

(Folks, I know that is hard-hitting. It is stepping on our toes. It may be smacking us upside our head. But that is the truth. We think that all the blessings and prosperity we are enjoying in this life is blessing from God. But it is sacrificing eternal rewards for current rewards and eternity is a lot longer than 50-80 years on earth.)

To complacent professing Christians I say Wake Up! You are living in Laodocia, if not downtown, then at least in its suburbs. Consider God's Word to the Corinthians... Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine.

2 Corinthians 13:5-

5 Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith

1 Corinthinas 3:13

13 each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. **14** If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. **15** If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

(We do not want to suffer loss! At the return of Christ, at the judgement day, at the Bema. We don't want to have regret. On that day we may hear **Not** Well Done...instead of "Well done though good and faithful servant.")

Your hope is on a blessed life now, rather than on a gloriously blessed life then! And this should free you in life now by delighting in the father and focusing on eternity.

Just look at the examples we have, Peter and Paul and the apostles and the book of Acts. Read what they endured. Why? Because they were looking at the future and what lies ahead in eternity.

Living for today has rewards in this life.

Living for rewards in eternity has eternal rewards.

We have the opportunity to do what Christ said. "Let your light so shine before men that they might glorify your father who is in heaven."