



THE GARDEN

9 WEEK BIBLE STUDY

embrace
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If you were to give your allegiance to the world, they would love and welcome you as one of their own.

But because you won't align yourself with the values of this world, they will hate you. I have chosen you and taken you out of the world to be mine.

JOHN 15:19 (TPT)

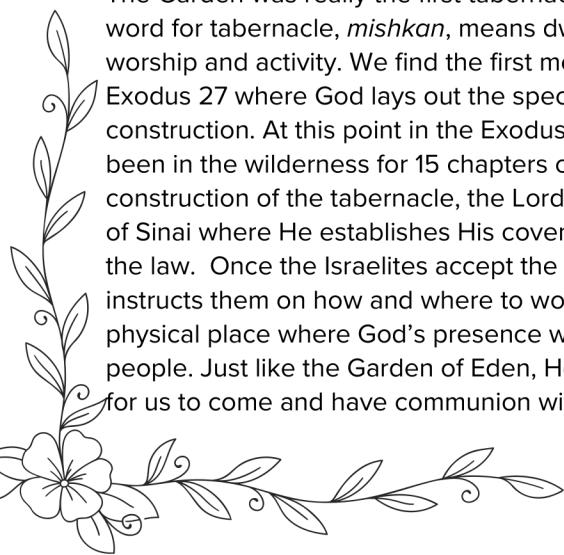
Garden Dwellers

Big Idea

In Genesis 2, as God looked out across the newly-formed creation, He decided to plant a garden in the east, in Eden. He selected this garden as His dwelling place on the Earth. From the garden flowed four mighty rivers; it was a wellspring of life for all that surrounded it. The garden itself was verdant and lush, fragrant and teeming with life. Two trees sat resplendent in the garden: the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It was a special, set-apart place, sacred and holy.

From the rich soil, God formed man in His image, and breathed His own breathe of life into the man's nostrils. Then "the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15). We were made for the set-apart place, to be the caretakers of the dwelling place of God's presence. We were made for the dewy grass between our toes, the wellspring of living water, and the fellowship of heaven. Though we were created from the soil in the garden, God set us apart from everything else that lived there when He gave us authority and dominion over it. As Garden Dwellers, we are *in* the world, but we *do not belong* to the world (John 17:16 TPT).

The Garden was really the first tabernacle, the first temple. The Hebrew word for tabernacle, *mishkan*, means dwelling. It was the centerpiece for worship and activity. We find the first mention of the tabernacle in Exodus 27 where God lays out the specific instructions for its construction. At this point in the Exodus narrative, the Israelites had been in the wilderness for 15 chapters or so. Eight chapters prior to the construction of the tabernacle, the Lord meets Moses on the mountain of Sinai where He establishes His covenant with Israel and hands out the law. Once the Israelites accept the law and covenant, the Lord instructs them on how and where to worship Him. The tabernacle is the physical place where God's presence would come and dwell among His people. Just like the Garden of Eden, He designed this place specifically for us to come and have communion with Him.

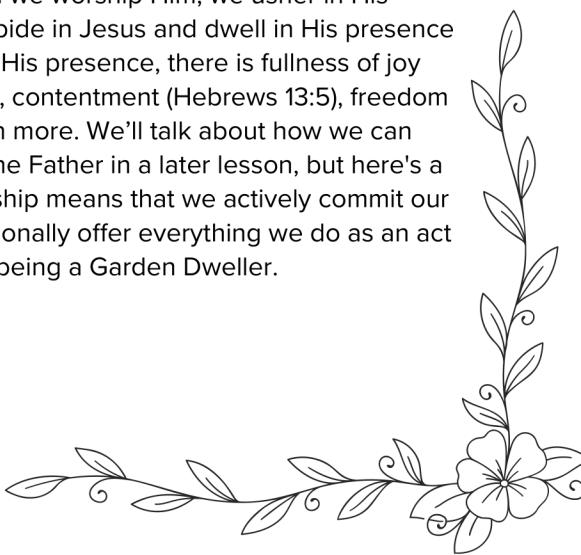


Nowadays, we have the benefit of looking at history through the lens of Jesus, but let's stick with the Exodus narrative for a bit longer. It serves well to help shape our understanding of what it means to be a Garden Dweller. The law and covenants God gives to Moses can be thought of as a Garden Dweller's Handbook.

When Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they introduced sin into the world, and it became a part of our DNA. Our bodies had been crafted from the dirt by the hand of the Lord as a perfect earthly representation of His perfect self. But when Adam and Eve sinned and were cast out of the Garden of Eden, the curse upon them made it impossible to return to dwell in God's presence. In Exodus, God helped the Israelites build a tabernacle, a dwelling place for Himself. He also gave the Israelites instructions on consecrating and preparing themselves for entrance into that dwelling place. His heart's desire has always been for us to have a way to remain in communion with Him. He created us out of love, for love, and it is His heart's desire to dwell with us.

Let's look at the word "dwell." To dwell is to be fully present in a place or with a person. It means that we abide, we are a permanent resident or inhabitant of a place—with emphasis on the permanence. "Dwell" also describes how we might settle in or engage with someone other than ourselves. Is God fully present in our lives? Do we engage with God daily? Are we permanent residents of His presence?

The work that Jesus did on the cross allows us to freely walk into His presence whenever we want to. God promises in Psalm 22:3 to inhabit the praises of His people. When we worship Him, we usher in His presence. We have access to abide in Jesus and dwell in His presence continually and permanently. In His presence, there is fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11), rest (Exodus 33:14), contentment (Hebrews 13:5), freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17) and so much more. We'll talk about how we can dwell in Jesus as He dwells in the Father in a later lesson, but here's a sneak peek. Living a life of worship means that we actively commit our whole selves to Him, and intentionally offer everything we do as an act of worship. That's the secret to being a Garden Dweller.

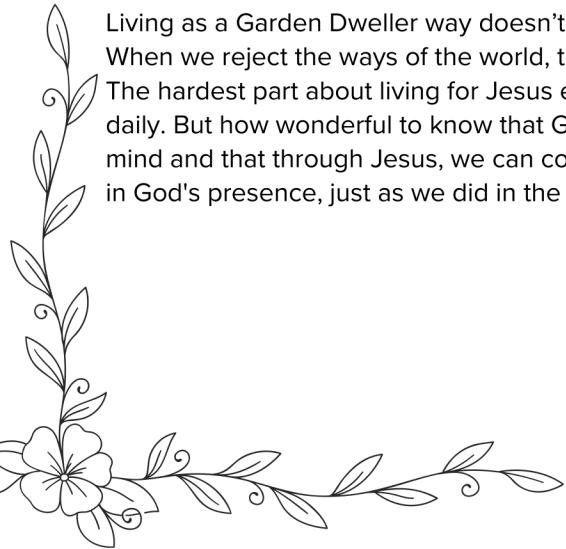


At the end of this age, when the Kingdom of Heaven is restored upon the earth, there will again be a garden—complete with a river and a Tree of Life. In that garden, we will make our eternal home with Jesus, our King. If we allow this concept to inform how we conduct ourselves and keep the prize at the end in the forefront of our minds, we can internalize this notion of being created as Garden Dwellers. We might be more inclined, therefore, to live a Christ-like life. Deuteronomy 14:2 says we are a “people holy to the Lord.”

The Lord has chosen us as His treasured possession. As such, we must heed Paul's instructions in Romans 12:1-2: “Surrender yourselves to God to be his sacred, living sacrifices. And live in holiness, experiencing all that delights His heart, for this becomes your genuine expression of worship. Stop imitating the ideals and opinions of the culture around you, but be transformed by the Holy Spirit through a total reformation of how you think. This will empower you to discern God's will as you live a beautiful life, satisfying and perfect in His eyes.”.

In the Old Testament, Levitical priests were required to present sacrifices on the altar to make atonement for sins. In the New Testament, the making of atonement was forever satisfied by the complete sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Instead of bringing a sacrifice to the Lord, we become a living sacrifice. Jago Wynne writes, "Our act of worship is no longer to bring a sacrifice but to *be one ourselves*. We remain living. It is *all of us* that is being offered. Worship is about what I say with my tongue. It's about what I watch... what I think... where I go with my feet..." (Jago Wynne, Working Without Wilting, IVP, 2009, *emphasis added*).

Living as a Garden Dweller way doesn't come without its challenges. When we reject the ways of the world, the world, in return, will reject us. The hardest part about living for Jesus every day is that we have to do it daily. But how wonderful to know that God designed us with the end in mind and that through Jesus, we can continually and permanently dwell in God's presence, just as we did in the Garden of Eden.



Discussion

Discuss the concept of being a Garden Dweller. Describe what it means to you to discover that you were created to dwell in the same holy place as the presence of God.

What does a sacrificed life look like? Sanctified by the Spirit (2 Thess. 2:13). Sanctified by Truth (John 17:15-18).

What steps will you take to align your life with Christ's?

Today:

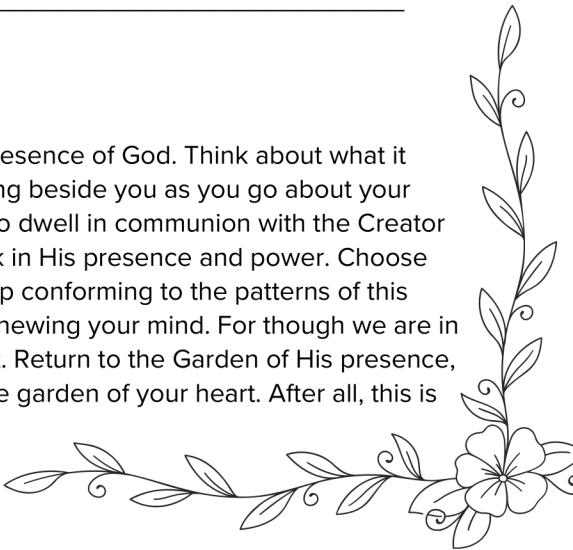
This week:

This month:

This year:

Takeaway

Imagine living each day in the presence of God. Think about what it would be like to have Him walking beside you as you go about your daily tasks. It is our very nature to dwell in communion with the Creator of heaven and earth, and to walk in His presence and power. Choose today to love and obey God. Stop conforming to the patterns of this world, and be transformed by renewing your mind. For though we are in the world, we do not belong to it. Return to the Garden of His presence, and ask Him to come dwell in the garden of your heart. After all, this is what you were made for.



Dear Dweller,

Come, walk in the cool of the garden with Me.

Enjoy the fragrance of My presence.

See the beauty I've crafted for our time together.

I will whisper sweet somethings in your ear
of the treasure you are.

Let me show you how to live in victory.

I wait.

