THE BLESSING IS IN
THE CLEANUP

Order, Responsibility, and Redemption

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Introduction: The Blessing Is in the Cleanup



Before anything needed cleaning up, GOD called the world good. Humanity received life in a creation filled with beauty, provision, and purpose. There was food to enjoy, meaningful work to accomplish, companionship to share, and fellowship with the One who made it all. Nothing needed to be repaired because nothing had yet been damaged by sin.

We are so accustomed to suffering, disappointment, and broken relationships that it can be hard to imagine a world without any of those things. Yet Genesis begins by showing us what GOD created before humanity experienced the consequences of disobedience.

That goodness matters because it helps us understand what was lost. Humanity's story begins with life received within GOD's care, and the suffering that follows reaches people whose lives matter to Him. As I looked more closely at familiar accounts, I found my-

self considering the people involved rather than only the events being described.

Those reflections changed how I considered the suffering around me. Every account of wrongdoing involves people whose lives extend beyond the moment we are examining. Someone may cause harm, while others must live with consequences they did not choose. Even when the person responsible acknowledges what happened, the damage may remain.

My understanding of responsibility also grew from ordinary experiences. My mother, Ms. Alice, taught me more by example than by instruction. When she cooked, she put the food into Tupperware, washed the pots, and put them away before she sat down to eat. She expected me to do the same and to consider the people who would come behind me. What seemed like a simple lesson about cleaning up after myself gradually became something I recognized in marriage, parenting, work, and ministry.

I began to see that responsibility involves more than completing a task or fixing a visible problem. Our decisions affect other people, sometimes in ways we do not immediately recognize. We may leave someone else carrying work we should have done, or speak

carelessly and discover that an apology cannot erase the hurt our words caused.

Wrongdoing can also become part of what families, communities, governments, and religious institutions accept as normal. Practices may continue for generations without people questioning the harm they cause. We can become so convinced that something is right, especially when people we respect have taught or practiced it, that we stop considering what it does to others.

We also encounter needs we had no part in creating. Someone may be hungry, grieving, or struggling with circumstances we cannot fully understand. We may not be responsible for what happened to them, but their suffering can still present an opportunity to respond with compassion.

Those experiences have caused me to ask questions that reach beyond my own responsibilities. Why do bad things happen to good people? If GOD is a loving GOD, why is there so much evil and suffering? Those questions become personal when someone we love is hurting or when we experience a loss we cannot repair. Alongside them, we face questions about how to live: how to take responsibility for the harm we cause,

care for people whose needs exceed what we can provide, and remain faithful when we cannot see how a situation will end.

As I returned to Scripture with those questions, I became increasingly aware that humanity's need was greater than anything we could repair on our own. The damage caused by sin reached beyond broken relationships and difficult circumstances. Our fellowship with GOD had been damaged, and death had entered the human experience.

That is why JESUS stands at the center of this story. He entered the world humanity had damaged and approached sinners with a mercy that often differed from the way people treated them. He did not excuse wrongdoing or pretend sin was harmless, but He also did not treat sinners as unworthy of love.

JESUS welcomed people others avoided, cared for those who were suffering, and confronted those who used their authority to burden others. Ultimately, He gave His life for sinners, providing the forgiveness and reconciliation we could never secure through our own efforts. His resurrection established a hope that reaches beyond every limitation we continue to experience.

Through the HOLY SPIRIT, GOD also continues changing how we live. His grace does not remove our responsibilities toward one another. It gives us reason to acknowledge our wrongdoing, accept correction, care for those who suffer, and let Him renew the thoughts and desires that shape our actions.

As we seek to live that way, we need to remain attentive to our relationship with GOD. We can become so focused on what needs to be done that we try to carry our responsibilities without bringing our concerns to Him or giving attention to His Word. In prayer, we can speak honestly about what we are facing, including what we do not understand and what we would rather avoid. As we read Scripture, we encounter His truth and learn to consider our lives in light of what He has said.

I have come to recognize that we cannot approach every problem believing it is ours to solve. Some circumstances lie beyond our understanding, some needs beyond our resources, and some losses no human effort can reverse. Accepting those limitations does not make our participation meaningless, because GOD still entrusts us with responsibilities in the lives we share.

This book follows the story from the goodness of creation through humanity's disobedience, GOD's response through JESUS, and the restoration He has promised. Along the way, we will consider the people affected by our choices, the suffering we encounter, and the ways GOD continues working within us as we learn to respond faithfully.

The blessing is not that the mess was necessary or that suffering somehow becomes good because we learn something from it. The blessing is that GOD has not abandoned humanity within the damage sin has caused. He has provided what we could never accomplish for ourselves, and He continues meeting us within the responsibilities and circumstances of our lives.

We may not always understand what He is doing, and we will not see every problem resolved before this life ends. But we can learn to recognize what belongs to us, trust Him with what does not, and respond to the people before us with the mercy we have received. The cleanup is not yet complete, but GOD is already at work.

Part One: The Good Order and the First Mess



Before considering what went wrong, we begin with the life GOD called very good. Humanity received fellowship, companionship, provision, and meaningful work within His creation. Nothing needed repairing, and the man and woman could live openly before GOD and one another.

Their disobedience introduced shame, fear, and separation, while the next generation experienced the devastating consequences of Cain's anger toward Abel. These chapters trace the shift from goodness received to lives damaged, helping us recognize what humanity lost and why restoration goes beyond our ability to repair.

Chapter 1: Before There Was a Mess



When GOD looked at everything He had made and called it very good, the man and woman were part of what He saw. The earth beneath their feet, the creatures around them, the food that would nourish them, and the people themselves all belonged within the goodness of His creation. Humanity's story began with life received from the One who knew exactly what He had made.

I have spent time thinking about what it might have been like to live there. We know moments when a meal, a beautiful place, or the company of someone we love gives us a deep sense that life is good. Genesis describes an entire creation that GOD Himself called good. The people within it could experience that goodness through the life He gave them, enjoying what their Creator delighted in.

The account brings us close to the beginning of that life. GOD formed the man from the dust of the ground

and breathed into him the breath of life. Through the care of the One who formed him, Adam became a living being, receiving both his body and the breath that animated it. His existence began in a relationship with GOD that would continue throughout his life.

The man and woman bore GOD's image and received His blessing. Their humanity carried the dignity given by their Creator, who addressed them and entrusted them with a place in His world. They could know Him, respond to Him, and participate in caring for what He had made. Their abilities belonged within that relationship, giving them meaningful ways to live among the other creatures sharing the earth.

GOD planted a garden in Eden and placed the man there. Trees grew that were pleasing to the eye and good for food, joining beauty with the nourishment that sustained him. A river watered the garden, and the tree of life stood within it. The place GOD provided offered a home in which life could be received, tended, and enjoyed.

I imagine the pleasure of noticing fruit among the leaves, reaching for it, and enjoying its taste. Genesis does not describe a particular meal, but its attention to trees that were beautiful and good for food gives us

something to consider. GOD made food to nourish us, but He also gave us the ability to enjoy eating it. A meal could satisfy the body while giving the person eating it reason to appreciate the world in which it grew.

We know something of that pleasure when we sit down to food we enjoy or pause to look at something beautiful. The color, shape, and taste of what grows can hold our attention, drawing us closer to the place around us. Those ordinary experiences help me appreciate the generosity in the garden's description. GOD provided things that supported life and made living a delight.

Adam also had work to do there. GOD placed him in the garden to cultivate and maintain it, giving him responsibility for the place he inhabited. Receiving its provision and caring for it went hand in hand. His work allowed him to participate in caring for the home GOD had provided.

There is satisfaction in caring for something good. We can experience it when we prepare a meal to share, tend a garden, or maintain a home where people enjoy being together. When we care for what we have been given, others can enjoy it too. As I consider Adam's

work, I imagine the pleasure of knowing a place through caring for it, becoming familiar with what grows there and taking part in its cultivation.

The living creatures also received his attention. GOD brought the animals before Adam to see what he would call them, and the names he gave became their names. Genesis lets us consider him encountering the life around him and exercising the authority entrusted to him. The creatures he named had their own place in the world GOD valued.

Within that world, GOD identified something that was not good. Until then, everything in the creation account was described as good, and GOD declared His completed creation very good. Yet before Adam and Eve disobeyed Him, before sin entered the world, GOD said it was not good for the man to be alone. What strikes me is that Genesis does not record Adam complaining about being lonely or asking GOD for a companion. GOD recognized the need. Adam had a home, food to enjoy, meaningful work, and fellowship with his Creator, but GOD had made him for a life that included human companionship. Among the animals brought before him, there was no helper corresponding to him. GOD knew what was needed and de-

clared His intention to provide someone who would share Adam's humanity and the life He had given him.

GOD caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep and formed the woman from his side. Unlike Adam, who had been formed from the dust of the ground, she came from his own flesh and bone, emphasizing the closeness of the relationship GOD was establishing. She was not created to stand above him or beneath him, but alongside him, sharing his humanity and bearing GOD's image. GOD then brought her to Adam, who recognized her as bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. Here was someone with whom he could share the life he had received, a companion suited to him in a way no other living creature had been.

The description of the woman as a corresponding helper gives that companionship substance. She could share Adam's life and responsibilities in a way none of the other creatures could. GOD had given him someone who shared his humanity and could walk alongside him. The word helper did not make her inferior to him, for Scripture also speaks of GOD as our helper. I find something deeply generous in GOD pro-

viding another person with whom the experience of being human could be shared.

Their union became the beginning of marriage, with the two joined as one flesh. Genesis describes them as naked and without shame, placing their bodies and their openness together within the goodness of their relationship. Sexual intimacy belonged to that shared life. They could receive one another as people whose bodies, companionship, and union were gifts from GOD.

I wonder about the ordinary enjoyment of having someone beside you in such a place. Genesis gives us no record of their daily conversations, but it gives us two people joined in a shared life. I can imagine the pleasure of drawing another person's attention to something beautiful or sitting together to enjoy food from the garden. The companionship GOD provided gave them someone with whom to share what they received.

His blessing also reached the generations that would follow. The man and woman were called to be fruitful and multiply, with the capacity to bring children into the world. Genesis does not describe a pregnancy or birth within this account of the garden, but family life

already had a place in GOD's purpose. The life they shared held the possibility of welcoming and caring for others.

Throughout these opening chapters, GOD remains involved with the people He has made. He blesses them, speaks to them, provides a place for them to live, and gives direction for their lives within it. His presence belongs at the center of the goodness they receive. The One who gave them life is also the One they can know and trust as they live it.

The instruction about the garden's trees came within that relationship. GOD told Adam he could freely eat from the trees, but directed him to leave the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil alone. Freedom to enjoy His provision existed alongside guidance about how to receive it. Adam could live within the abundance around him while trusting the wisdom of the One who had provided it.

That dependence helps me understand humanity's place within creation. Adam could cultivate what GOD caused to grow, name the creatures GOD brought to him, and enjoy the home GOD had planted. His participation was substantial, and the life sustaining it

still came from his Creator. Being human meant receiving from GOD while using what He had given.

Genesis also tells us that GOD completed His work, rested on the seventh day, blessed it, and made it holy. Completion and rest belong within the account of a world He called very good. As I read, I see meaningful activity held within that larger goodness, with room to appreciate what has been made and enjoy the life it supports.

The people in the garden had a place within that completed creation. They could cultivate it, receive its food, and share its pleasures while living in fellowship with the One who had given it to them. Their companionship and their responsibilities were part of the same life, each giving them ways to participate in the goodness surrounding them.

I want to give that life the attention it deserves. To be known by GOD, to receive His care, and to share a home within His creation is already something wonderful to consider. The man and woman belonged there together, with work worth doing and good things to enjoy. When GOD looked upon the world that held them, He called everything He had made very good.