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## Genesis

### A Place to Cultivate Chapter 2 (vs.15-20)

If you turn your Bibles to Genesis 2, we now come into the garden, and we see the placement of Adam in the garden. We not only see the placement of the Adam in the garden, but we see a job to do. He has a job to do. It's to cultivate the garden. So, we're going to be talking about cultivation. What does it mean? What is God doing through this process? On the surface, we read something like this, and we go, "Ok, so we get to hoe the garden and pull out the weeds or whatever." There probably weren't any weeds at that time. So, he probably had it pretty easy, but it's far more than that because God is really preparing him for something as we go through this passage. As I was and have been reading through Scripture, I am convinced that God is in no way ambiguous about where He stands about things. He is not unclear about what He loves and who He loves. You open up the Book of Genesis and there's no mistake, He loves man. Now, the confusion arises when man has to love Him back. Does man love Him back? You know, it's very confusing, but not with God. Everything that He does is good for man, and you read this at the very beginning. We understand that God is described in such a way as would describe transparency or light. 1 John says that God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. James would tell us that He is the Father of lights, whom there is no variance or shadow of shifting. That's telling us that you don't have to guess what God is about. You don't have to guess what truth is about. He's very transparent about that. He's very open about it. So, we've seen very clearly as we've looked in the Book of Genesis, that He loves man, and all these things that He has showered upon him is really a result of God bestowing His love upon man.

Within this particular passage, we see that God has prepared a place for him and a purpose for him, and that is a loving act, as we clearly see. Not only has He done that, but as we come into the passage, we begin to see that He gives a pleasurable variety. In other words, one of the statements that He makes is, "Of every tree you can eat." I mean, think about that, He could have just put one tree in the garden and said, "Have at it." And yet, you see the manifold grace of God, You see the manifold experiences that He presents before Adam. Oftentimes, I think the perception that man has is that God is trying to rob him of having experiences, joy, experimental things, imagination. Of course, God gave us the imagination, but it was so that we might have a fullness of joy. So, all these things are clearly benefits of God and it's no mistake that He is doing this because He loves man. Scripture tells us, "For God so loved the world."

Now, we read that in John 3:16 and we go, “Well, God just started loving the world.” You have to remember that God doesn't change. He's immutable. So, if God loved the world in John 3:16, then God loved the world forever. Even before it was created, God has loved the world. So, the love of God is clearly seen within the passage, and as we come to this passage in verse 15, we begin to see God working in the life of man for a particular reason.

Pick up with me in Genesis 2:15 as it starts off with this particular phrase,

“Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden...”

Actually, a phrase that seemed to refer to Him actually fetching Adam. That's an interesting picture, isn't it? I wonder if He just took him by the hand. What if it's actually Christophanies in the garden and He walked with him? It seems to convey that later on in the passage. Anyway, the Lord took the man, and He put him into the Garden of Eden. Of course, once again, just to describe the Garden of Eden or “ēden” within the text, it's making reference to a place of not only pleasure, but of luxury, and God has just clearly given the best a man in in the text.

So, He then places him in the garden, and if you look at the end of verse 15,

“... to cultivate it and keep it.”

There are two things that He actually makes reference to, that is cultivating and keeping it. The second really has to do with a guarding and watching over in the sense of keeping and observing and regarding the garden. The first really has to do with a kind of service, and you could actually put the word “work” in there. I mean, there was work before the fall, which means that the work was enjoyable. The passage is making reference to the fact that there's clearly something that he's there to do; there's clearly something that God wants him to serve. So, we see a desire that God has for man to exert some kind of energy, some kind of effort within the keeping of the garden.

Then verse 16 reads this way,

“The LORD God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; (Genesis 2:17) but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”

(Genesis 2:18) Then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.”

(Genesis 2:19) Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name.

(Genesis 2:20) The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him."

Now, I want you to note some things within this paragraph. I want you to look at the beginning of verse 15 and in the NAS, it uses the word, "then," and in the King James, it will go back and forth and probably use "and" sometimes as a substitute, but the word basically and fundamentally means the same thing. If you look at the beginning of verse 15, it uses the word "then."

Then, verse 16, "and." Do you see that?

Then, verse 18, "then," right?

Then, verse 19, "and."

Then, verse 20, "and." Are you seeing that? Now, once again, I want to emphasize this, this is what's called a sequential imperfect and what that means is that is that He's building on something. So, all of these are relating to each other that God is working up to something. They are connected to each other for a particular purpose. So, when He starts off and He commands the man to work in the garden, it has something to do with if you drop all the way down to verse 20, finding a wife. They're all connected. So, the relationship with the wife and the not eating of the tree of good and evil, and that you're dealing with the fact that you can eat of any tree, and even the fact that He's calling the animals to come before Adam, so that Adam would name them is directly connected to the very end. It's almost a kind of conclusion and a culminating effect. So, the question is, what is He wanting to do? Clearly, you have to go back to the first verse in verse 15, which He begins to deal with this cultivation. What is cultivation? Well, cultivation would probably be described in the more literal sense of plowing and digging and working and farming and all those kinds of things, but really what it's talking about is preparing. It's talking about developing the land. It's talking about nurturing and even encouraging in the more figurative sense; that there is a kind of preparation that is going on and that's really what the passage is going to be emphasizing. There is a kind of preparation that's going on; that God is cultivating certain things.

Psalm 37, one of our favorites, deals with the fact that we shouldn't be concerned about what the unrighteous are doing, what we should do is dwell in the land, and it uses the word "cultivate" faithfulness. Actually, in that particular text, it could probably more accurately be translated pasturing or tending like a flock. That's pretty interesting because I think in a way Scripture is really inferring that both are tied together, because there is a kind of a nurturing of the land. There is a kind of encouraging of the land as well as with the sheep in the pasture and a shepherd that is doing that kind of thing. So, when we look at this, what we're talking about is God is wanting man to cultivate something. Now, as we go on in the passage, what is clear at

the very beginning in the garden is that God is wanting man to cultivate a kind of stewardship. He's given him this plot. He has actually placed him in this place, and he goes, "Ok, this is what you're going to do." Now, that's actually a stewardship that God has given to him, and God is wanting him to put some kind of effort in it, some kind of expression in it. Part of the test, I think, would be, is he going to be faithful to do what he's going to do? Scripture says it's required of stewards that they be found faithful, right? So, fidelity is going to be something that he's going to be looking for, as well as a kind of care and fostering. How is he going to come into this passage? Hebrews 10 says this, that we ought to "consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds." In a way, God has given us all a kind of plot of land. He's given us responsibilities wherever we are.

We refer back to Acts 17, the fact that God has given us a place and has raised us in a place for a particular reason. He has given us things that He wants us to do. We don't know it right away, but as things begin to be revealed to us, we begin to understand, and we begin to adopt certain things, and we begin to see certain things. We're very uniquely made, and we begin to work in a certain way, but God is testing our resolve for our stewardship. God is looking, He says, "I've given you this land. What are you going to do with it?" Now, what's interesting to me is that God's leaving out a lot of detail. As you look at a passage like Colossians 3, or you look at Ecclesiastes, the writer says in Ecclesiastes, whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might. So, God is not necessarily telling you exactly what you have to do. He does plot you in a certain place. You end up at a certain place. I don't know how you got there, but you got there. The question is, what did you decide to do? Adam had a lot of decisions to make. I mean, he has a lot of choices before him. The garden is literally full of choices. What are you going to do?

Colossians says, "whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." "Whatever" is a huge word, isn't it? I mean, think of all of the options that you have before you. So, he starts off with this sense of cultivating stewardship. What are you going to do with what you have? You can invest it this way. You can invest it that way. How are you going to invest it? The decisions that you make, the choices that you make are going to define who you are. They're not only going to define who you are, but they're also going to reveal your heart. You can say a lot of things. You can say that you believe something. You can say that you're going to do something, but the choices that you make in your life is going to literally reveal what your heart is. I watch more the choices that people make than I do what they say. Many a man proclaims his loyalty, right? But a faithful man, who can find? The question you want to ask yourself is, what choices do they make? How do they decide the things that they decide?

So, He starts off with the stewardship, a great and interesting example. The second thing that He then brings him into, if you look in verse 16,

“The LORD God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely.”

There's a sense of allowing him to explore. Well, we're going to say, he's exploring his taste. He can eat of any of the trees freely. So, that's kind of exploring really not only of his taste, but of his senses. I don't know why we have certain tendencies. I don't know why we have certain proclivities, do you? Why is it that some of us just seem to gravitate towards one thing and others gravitate towards something else? I don't know. In some ways, we kind of explore our senses and certain things appeal to us more than others, and we're drawn to them. In this interesting scenario, He's literally allowing Adam to make decisions on his own, and you can go to any tree you want to and choose whatever you want to, and let's see where your taste leads you. You're going to have different tastes. The end result, and what we're going to ultimately get to, is that you've got to be willing to lay all these things on the altar. Scripture will tell us in Romans that we need to present our bodies a living sacrifice which means that there are going to be things that ok, we get it, you're drawn to certain things, but are you willing to let go of them? So, as we go through this, in order to make a choice, you have to have things that you like as well. In other words, if you like this thing, and you don't like this then I'm not really sure it's a choice. If you like this and you like this, it's a choice. Choice starts getting involved. So, He then goes into the passage, and it begins to convey the fact that man has to make this choice, and he can make any choice he wants to with all the trees that are there.

Then verse 17, he then takes them to the extreme on the other side.

“But from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”

Now at that juncture, He's going to have him cultivate something that probably Adam had never cultivated before, and that is a thing called restraint. Because we know that the tree was something to look onto. We know that it was something that would be alluring. It was alluring to Eve, and it describes it in such a way. He's going to have to restrain himself. Scripture is full of examples of things that we have to restrain ourselves from. You go out into a world, and it's fundamentally, a smorgasbord. “You can have whatever you want.” If you have enough money, you can have whatever you want. Go after it. Then, there are times when you realize, “I need to bring restraint in this because if I don't, great harm could come.” So, a roadblock will come up and you have to deal with restraint. I mean, probably one of the hardest things that a 2-year-old has to deal with is the word “no.” They learn the word, but they don't learn how to do it. So, Scripture is revealing to us that a sense of restraint is very important.

When you think of Romans 14, one of the things that God is telling us to do is, it's going to be kind of hard for some of us, should I say it? Restrain your opinions. Yeah, basically keep your opinions to yourself. You have to practice some sort of restraint in so doing.

1 Corinthians is going to be talking about in Chapter 10, restraining your personal gratifications. There are certain things that you like to do. There are certain places you want to go to, but Paul will say, but you realize that those places and those things that you want to do could hurt somebody. You need to restrain yourself. He's not saying that the places are necessarily bad in and of themselves, or the food that you eat is necessarily bad in and of itself, but if eating meat would cause somebody hurt, you need to restrain yourself. So, you have all these wonderful things to choose from, but the necessity of restraint is something that we actually have to learn to do.

Ephesians 4 says that we have to restrain our words; only such a word that is good for the moment. I oftentimes think about that because it's really easy to say something really quick and you could be right. Scripture says you ought to speak the truth, but then that second part, "in love." Ok, I'm not sure I did that. So, Scripture is revealing to us that you're going to have to restrain and ask yourself a very simple question, "Will this benefit anything? Will this literally bring this person closer to the Lord, or am I just blowing smoke? Am I just saying something that I want to get off my chest to put them in their place? I've got to restrain my words. I've got to restrain my opinions. There are things that I have to restrain. I'm learning to restrain. If you think about the training of a child, you're training the child this way. You want to train your child to be responsible. There's a kind of stewardship that you're given. You want to train your child to develop their taste. You don't want them just to eat cocoa puffs. That probably wouldn't be really wise. So, you want them to learn these things. The question is, why are you teaching them this? The answer is pretty simple, as a parent you would say, "I want them to be mature or I want them to be able to handle life." But even beyond that, I would hope that your goal is "I want them to have a wonderful relationship as they grow up with somebody else. I want them to be able to enjoy their life with somebody else." That in a way, what you're cultivating are the necessities for the relationship. So, not only is restraint within the passage, and clearly, we're dealing with the impulses of the heart.

I like Ecclesiastes 11, if you look here with me. Some verses just say it all, don't they?

(Ecclesiastes 11:9) "Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart..."

Stop there. It kind of feels like you're in the garden. "Go for it. Whatever tree, go for it."

"... follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things."

Did you hear restraint in that in that at all? So, you saw a sense of God opening up the door to so many choices and so many wonderful things; the pleasures that God has in store for us, the variety of experiences that are available to us, and yet restraint has to come in. Now, here again, the thought is, "How can I really enjoy the garden if I have to restrain myself? I mean, I just can't see the upside of that." But the reason why we can't see the upside is because we're not seeing the goal of the garden. In our perception, the garden is the goal. Paradise, just live in paradise. God goes, "There's something more valuable than paradise." So, this is all a preparation, and it's all part of the cultivation. We are cultivating a sense of, as Psalm 37 would say, we're cultivating faithfulness. So, there is a cultivation of restraint in this particular passage. Once again, these are all conjoining with each other.

So, then, in verse 18, if you pick up with me,

"Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.""

I don't even know where that came from. That came out of the blue. I mean, we're in the garden, we're eating fruit, I guess. Eating things. We're enjoying life, restraining ourselves, then all of a sudden, "It's not good for him to be alone." Our immediate thought is that God is simply thinking along the lines of the man's enjoyment, but there is far more that's being conveyed when He says it's not good. Because it is that picture of somebody basically introverted and egotistic and only thinking about themselves, that's not a good thing, and only pursuing the things that gratify them at any particular moment. You mean, there hasn't been one thought in Adam's head, "Yeah, but what about?" There hasn't been one thought, but there was a lot in God's head, and He said it's not good, "This is not a good thing."

There's a passage in Proverbs, if you look with me in Proverbs 18, another one of those go to passages. It starts off this way,

(Proverbs 18:1) "He who separates himself seeks his own desire..."

The word that he uses there is "selfish desires" or "his own appetites." In other words, he's ruled by his own appetites. Here again, I think some people would say, "Well, what's the big deal about that?" But the point of the matter is that he separates himself; he divides himself. You'll never be able to have a relationship, ever, when he's just thinking about himself. I mean, why is it that Paul would send Timothy and nobody else? He says, "Nobody else actually, genuinely cares for you like Timothy." That's what he said in Philippians 2. So, what we see is this sense of cultivation. In a way, God is cultivating this sense of you do know that in order to really love, you have to have somebody that you're thinking of more than yourself? It has to exist. It's not good for man to think this way. God is cultivating more than a sense of stewardship and taste and restraint. God is actually cultivating the relationship here, and that's

one of the reasons why they're all kind of cumulative in the fact that He's building. It doesn't appear just out of nowhere when He proclaims it's not good for man to be alone. This is where he's heading. It's not the final journey, but it's where he's heading, and it is in the relationship. So, I want you to go back there,

“Then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone...”

Ecclesiastes 4:9 says, “Two are better than one...”

Hebrews 10:25 says you shouldn't forsake one another.

Scripture is conveying to us about the relationships and the things that we need to pursue. It's almost bizarre to me that Adam wouldn't have thought of this, because it is pretty clear up to this point that the animals had mates. I think then God takes it a degree further and He goes, “Ok Adam, let's have you sit down and look at all the animals.” So, he has them all parade.

If you read the passage with me, and here again, I want to show you the cumulative effect. It says this in verse 18,

“Then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.””

Now, it then kind of throws in this parenthetical phrase in the next setting, that seems to say once again, ok, now we're going back to the animals. But we're not going back to the animals because we're getting Adam to think about a relationship.

So, the passage reads this way,

(Genesis 2:19) “Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name.”

Now here again, God has given man choice, and in the choice, he is arbitrarily, maybe thoughtfully, naming the animals. In order for him to name the animals, what does he have to do? He has to observe what they're doing. Here again, birds flutter and creepy things crawling. So, these kinds of words are going to be used to describe, but what God is doing is honing his observational skills. Why? Because he's going to have a mate, and Adam doesn't know the text yet, but according to 1 Peter 3, you have to live with your wife in an understanding way which means you're going to have to observe what she does, what she likes, the things that are important to her. This is the way that you begin to understand. The psalmist says that God is intimately acquainted with all of our ways. That means He's involved with what we do, and God is observing how Adam is responding to these things, the choices that he's making, and I think it also was interesting that God is letting him make the choices. It's not like God named the

animals and He says, "Ok, Adam, call them this." He says, "Adam, you name them, and that'll be the name for them." Scripture is telling us that God lets us make decisions. I think some of us would probably look heavenly and we would go something like, "Is that ok?" And He goes, "Well, that's what you named him." I mean, would God have named them that way? I don't think He would have necessarily named them the same way, but He's letting man have the choice to do that. So, the passage reads that way, and then if you look in verse 20,

"The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him."

What is the text telling you? This is about a helper. This exercise was for Adam to be prepared for something; that God was actually cultivating the relationship. The whole stewardship of the garden, that was cultivating the relationship; the whole thing of taste, and he may have to give up some of his taste for this woman. She may not like certain foods. I don't know if that's ever happened to you before, but the values that he begins to take on are pretty interesting. The way that God sneakily interjects it is, He goes, "Ok, Adam, now, is anything missing?" And what He's doing is He's causing Adam to reflect on his own thoughts and in a way, develop a sense of values. What is important? Man, I think, can get so caught up and the mechanics of the world that he doesn't think about relationships. It's like a guy, maybe he's working on his car or something, and his wife comes up and she goes, "Do you know what today is?" Why doesn't she just tell him what the day is? I don't know if she just wants to torture him or what it is?

Deuteronomy 8, if you look there with me. It's a great passage because in a way, God does this to us throughout our lives. Why doesn't He just say it? Because He's wanting you to think through it. Why? Because He's wanting you to make the choice. The choices that you make are very important. What choices are you going to make? Why are you making the choices that you make? Are you making the choice out of your heart? Do you have a value system? Do you know what's important? The way that Deuteronomy 8 puts it is,

(Deuteronomy 8:2) "You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness..."

When God led the children of Israel out of the wilderness, He was very thoughtful. He was very powerful. He supplied all their needs. I mean, in the wilderness, how do you eat in the wilderness? Well, you don't. How do you drink in the wilderness? You don't drink, and yet they did.

"You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not."

(Deuteronomy 8:3) He humbled you and let you be hungry..."

Have you ever had those times where you go, "Ok, I'm not happy about this. I'm missing this." Do you think God is really that concerned about your food, or do you think He's asking you, "Maybe you're missing something else." It's interesting about our senses, the things that we gravitate towards, the things that are very important to us, feeding our face, enjoying the pleasures of the things that we like. As you remember, the children of Israel come out of Egypt, they go, "Wow, the food was better there." So, here they have these senses and God goes, "Shouldn't you be thinking about something more important than your food?" So, sometimes He lets us go without because you begin to think, "Am I missing something? Did I miss something? Did I not do something?"

The way that it reads is,

"He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD."

Now, in that particular text, what's more valuable? You eating, or?

In Jeremiah 15, Jeremiah kind of gives us this sense of coming to, we'll call it epiphany. He begins to, in a way, kind of debate with God, because things are going rough. You know those days when things aren't going your way? When we say things aren't going our way, what's usually being attacked? All those things of our senses that we love so much. You know those things that you pursued on your own? Ok. So, God's going to use those. It says in Jeremiah Chapter 15, as Jeremiah will say, "But you know that more than anything else, I loved Your word." And he begins to prove it. There's a choice that he makes. One of the reasons why you have desires and you have things that you love, is so that you'll make a choice. God gives you things that you love personally, but then He wants you to love things that are more valuable in a greater way; that you would even let go of those things that your senses would draw you to.

(Jeremiah 15:16) "Your words were found and I ate them,  
And Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart;  
For I have been called by Your name,  
O LORD God of hosts."

"So, I made a choice. My choice was that I'd rather eat Your words than eat at their tables." That's denying your senses. It's a pretty interesting way to look at it.

(Jeremiah 15:17) "I did not sit in the circle of merry-makers,  
Nor did I exult.  
Because of Your hand upon me I sat alone,  
For You filled me with indignation.

(Jeremiah 15:18) Why has my pain been perpetual  
And my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?  
Will You indeed be to me like a deceptive stream  
With water that is unreliable?"

What is he saying? Well, I think in a way, what he's saying is, "I didn't know my choice would cause this much pain to me." God is cultivating in our lives a relationship. He's going to allow us, He's going to even give us choices, decisions, things that we love. "Go ahead, young man." He says, "Go ahead." But the day is going to come where the young man's going to have to make a choice, and the choice might be, "Do I love my wife more than I love these things?" There's nothing wrong with the things, nothing wrong with enjoyment. It's all part of the garden, but God is going to use the garden to cultivate something greater; something far more valuable than anything that's in the garden, and that's a relationship. He's going to do it through different means, in the sense that He's going to help man cultivate, and He's going to say, "Ok, now, work, work, but would you have that same energy for her, or for somebody else? Would you put that much effort in the relationship? It is interesting to watch people, the choices that they make and the effort that they put in just making money, and yet how they just throw up their arms when it comes to relationship. "Ah, it's too hard." And I'm going, "Really? I mean, you went through all these years of school just to do this, and you can't put a little bit of effort in the relationship?" See, God is leading up to the relationship.

The interesting passage in Genesis, if you go a little bit further with me, Genesis 13. Here again, we're very familiar with the story, in which we have Abraham, he's with his nephew Lot.

(Genesis 13:5) "Now Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents.

(Genesis 13:6) And the land could not sustain them while dwelling together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to remain together."

Do you think they would have been able to remain together if somebody had let go of stuff? If Lot would have let go of stuff? I don't know.

(Genesis 13:7) "And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. Now the Canaanite and the Perizzite were dwelling then in the land.

(Genesis 13:8) So Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers.""

What is Abraham saying? "Our relationship is far more important than anything to me."

(Genesis 13:9) "'Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me; if to the left, then I will go to the right; or if to the right, then I will go to the left.'"

(Genesis 13:10) Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the valley of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere—this was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah—like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go to Zoar.

(Genesis 13:11) So Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they separated from each other."

You know, if Lot were in our church today, he'd probably come up to the pastor and he'd probably ask a question like, "Pastor, you think it would be ok if I choose a really nice piece of property?" And the pastor would probably say something like, "Your choice." Man doesn't always throw in all the details of what's involved. He just simply wants to know, "Is it ok to make this choice?" But when he makes the choice, he purposely doesn't consider the relationship. He wants an answer to the question, "Is it ok to do this?" It's your choice. The question shouldn't be even necessarily, "Is it right or wrong?" That's an interesting point that I want to bring out, especially tonight. The question you're dealing with is not necessarily right and wrong, it's good and evil, and that's where the tree is going to come in. What we're asking you to discern is good and evil; in other words, will this be beneficial? That's the word "good". Will this help? Will this actually be virtuous and bring about the greater good, or will it be calamitous and hurtful? Will it have an effect that might bring hurt to somebody? That's the question. Man likes the question "Is it right or wrong?" And there are a lot of choices. Was Lot wrong to choose the wonderful, beautiful land out there? I would say, "No." Was it a good choice? No, it was an evil choice. He could not discern good and evil because he wasn't looking to discern that, he was just looking for a license to get what he wanted. So, people throw out these choices and they make choices based on the sense of "Is it wrong for me to do this?" I can't say that it's wrong. I can say that it's going to be injurious to you. Is it wrong for people to have money? It's not wrong for you to have money. Is it injurious to love money? It is injurious. The love of money is the root of all sorts of evil. So, the question that you need to ask yourself is, "Where's the good and evil in this?"

The passage in Hebrews 5 will bring this to fruition as well. I like the way that it ends this chapter in verse 11. We have a lot to say about Melchizedek, and many of the spiritual things that he was bringing up within the passage, as well as, clearly, the obedience of Christ Himself in verses 8 and 9.

(Hebrews 5:11) “Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

(Hebrews 5:12) For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

(Hebrews 5:13) For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.”

Now, let's just stop there. What he's talking about is clearly immaturity, and immaturity is not necessarily looking to ask the question about relationship, it's just simply asking, “Can I do this? Would I be in trouble if I did it?” They're always thinking in those kinds of terms. Are they thinking about, “Would this actually bringing you closer to your brother and sister?” They're not thinking about that because they're not trained to think that way. They're not trained to think what is good and what is hurtful, they're trained to think, “Can I do this?” And “Is it ok?”

So, the passage reads this way in verse 14,

“But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.”

This is actually, once again, almost a quote from Genesis, dealing with the tree of the Knowledge, or you could put in there, the discernment of good and evil; it is the discernment of good and evil. You say, “Well, why doesn't God just tell me, ‘Do this. Don't do that.’?” For the same reason that He asked you, “Is something missing? Have you noticed that there's not somebody to share your life with?” “Uh, not really.” Why? Because you have no heart for it, but what God is wanting to do is cultivate a heart. “Have you noticed that all the animals seem to have a mate?” “Yeah, it seems a little weird.” “Have you noticed that you don't have one?” “Hmm. I wonder why that is?” You can almost sense he's still not there. God is doing everything and here again, He's cultivating this relationship so that man would recognize Him. The Bible says in 1 John, look, if we can't love the people that we see, how can we love the one that we don't see? But it's part of the cultivation of the relationship of God, our relationship with one another; the two basic commands, love one another and love God with all your heart. God is cultivating these things in us, but we don't think that way because we have a lot of other decisions that we're making based on our senses and based on our projects and based on our efforts, and God says, “Something's missing, and I want you to think through this.” I mean, it's ok for you to have these things, it's ok to enjoy these things, but at what point would you give them up? See, the choices that you make will define your heart. It's very simple.

When you come into 1 Corinthians 8, when you go into 1 Corinthians 10, he goes, "Look, whether it's the place that you choose to dine or the things that you eat, I want you to have one thought, how does it affect the people around you?" You're going, "Wait, let me just ask you one question, is it ok if I eat the meat?" He says, "That's not what I want you to ask. What I want you to ask is, would it be injurious if you ate the meat? Would it hurt somebody?" And people don't think through this. Now, here again, I know the thought is, "Why doesn't He just tell me? Why didn't the pastor just tell me?" It's your decision. The decision reveals the heart. I've thought through this for many years, and I watch people. I watch the decisions that they make. When we bring men into the office, I watch the decisions that they make. I want them to study the word of God; I want the word of God to dwell in them richly. I want it to be a part of their life. I want them to be very knowledgeable about the word of God, but I actually care more about the choices that they make. If I can see them make choices in which they give up things that they could have. I'm not talking about giving up the bad. That's a given. You don't want to do something wrong, but I'm talking about giving up things, as Scripture would say, that would be a good thing for you but would hurt somebody else. See, that's the reason you have passages like Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 8, 1 Corinthians 12 as it goes into as well, and then ultimately in Chapter 10 that it really says, "Look, I'm not going to do anything that would cause any brother to stumble." I mean, Christ paid the price for that person. If you think about it, it would be impossible to have any kind of deep relationship if in fact you reneged in any way; you didn't give your all; you didn't give up those things that were pleasurable to you. You're training your senses, not in the way of "That tastes really good," and "That tastes bad." That's not the way you train your senses. I remember the first time I smelled marijuana, and when I was smelling, I go, "That smells kind of sweet. That smells kind of good. I wonder what that is?" And someone looked at me, "That's Mary Jane." I don't even know who Mary Jane was. Anyway, from then on, when I smelled that smell, guess what? I said, "I've got to stay away from that place." Now, what I did was I trained my senses. Your senses gravitate maybe to perhaps the things that seem enjoyable, but you have to train them to come up with a conclusion, "Is this hurtful or not?" Not "Does it smell good? Does it feel good? Does it taste good?" But "Will it help? Will it build up? Am I willing to sacrifice?" You watch the people that are willing to sacrifice things that are good to them for somebody else, and I'll show you character of the heart that's being revealed.

Go to Philippians 2, and we'll close with this particular passage.

(Philippians 2:19) "But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition."

(Philippians 2:20) For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare.

(Philippians 2:21) For they all seek after their own interests...

Let me stop here. Let me ask simple question, Is that ok? Is it ok to enjoy things? Scripture says that God has given you all things to enjoy freely. You can eat of any tree that you want to. What was missing? The discernment of good and evil. In a way, God was cultivating, I believe, man to partake of that tree of good and evil. He wasn't there yet because you have to have this sense of value, "What is really valuable?" in order to use that discernment properly. I mean, we've all run into people that go, "Yep, that's wrong." And they still do it. So, just the knowledge that something's wrong doesn't really help until the heart is cultivated to do the right thing in that information. This passage is telling us that Timothy was the kind of person that had a kindred spirit, and he would be willing to think of people before himself. That's why the chapter starts off, you back up, it says,

(Philippians 2:3) "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;

(Philippians 2:4) do not merely look out for your own personal interests..."

Is it ok to look out for your own personal interests? Yeah, it's ok, until it hurts somebody else. "Why didn't Jesus tell me what to do?" It's your choice, but the choice that you make is going to define who you are, and it's going to define what your heart is, and every decision you make is solidifying them. God gave man a choice, isn't that a miraculous picture? But in the choices, He's cultivating. Lot was being tested in his decision.

### **Closing Prayer:**

Father, we give You thanks for the choices that You give us. We give You thanks for cultivating through these things, our hearts; revealing things to us that might even be hidden from us. The psalmist puts it so apply, "Look inside me. See if there be any evil way within me." And it might not only be presumptuous sins, but there might also be sins that I would be deceptive about in my own life. Father, I have to admit that to You. Help us as we make the choices in this world that You've placed us, in the setting that You've given us. May we not just think in terms of "Is it ok?" But may we think in terms of "What is the good and what is the destructive in this decision?" We pray this in Your name. Amen.