

OUR RETURN TO EDEN

Introduction

Long before humanity searched for God, God was moving toward humanity.

Before there was a garden, there was desire.

Before there was a covenant, there was communion.

Before there was sin, there was Love.

The story we have often called redemption did not begin because humanity failed. It began because Love has always desired union.

Perhaps this is where we have misunderstood the story.

Many of us inherited a picture of salvation as though heaven were a courtroom, humanity stood condemned, and Christ somehow persuaded an unwilling Father to reduce our sentence.

But what if redemption is more beautiful than acquittal?

What if it is homecoming?

From the opening pages of Scripture to the final vision of Revelation, one desire echoes through every generation:

“I will dwell with them.”

The Garden of Eden was never merely geography. It was the atmosphere of unhindered communion.

There was no shame.

No hiding.

No striving.

No fear that tomorrow’s failure might cancel today’s embrace.

Humanity knew itself because humanity knew the Father.

Then came a question.

“Did God really say...?”

The serpent’s first assault was not against humanity.

It was against trust.

Hidden beneath that ancient question was another:

“Can the Father truly be trusted?”

The moment suspicion entered, everything changed.

Fear replaced freedom.

Shame replaced innocence.

Humanity reached for coverings instead of communion and hid among the very trees that had once proclaimed the goodness of their Creator.

Yet something remarkable happened.

The Father came anyway.

He walked through the garden in the cool of the day.

He called,

“Where are you?”

Not because He had lost His children.

But because His children believed they had lost Him.

Perhaps the whole story of Scripture is the answer to that one moment.

The Tabernacle whispers,

“I still desire to dwell with you.”

The Prophets proclaim,

“I have loved you with an everlasting love.”

The Incarnation declares,

“If you wish to know Me, look upon My Son.”

The Cross reveals,

“There is no distance Love will not cross.”

The Resurrection announces,

“Death cannot imprison Life.”

Pentecost fulfills the promise,

“My dwelling place is now within you.”

This book is an invitation to rediscover that story.

Not the story of humanity climbing toward God...

but of God continually moving toward humanity.

Not a journey back to a forgotten garden...

but an awakening to the Presence that has never stopped pursuing us.

Our return to Eden is not about recovering a location.

It is about remembering a relationship.

It is the restoration of trust.

It is the unveiling of the Father's heart.

It is discovering that Christ did not come to persuade the Father to love us.

He came to persuade us that the Father already does.

And perhaps, after all these years, that is what Eden has always been waiting for.

Chapter One - The Garden Before the Garden

Perhaps Eden did not begin with trees.

Perhaps it began with desire.

Before there was dust shaped into humanity, there was Love.

Before there was breath in Adam's lungs, there was delight within the heart of the Creator.

Creation was never God's attempt to fill a loneliness, nor was humanity an afterthought added to an otherwise complete universe. Love is never compelled to create; Love creates because it delights in sharing itself.

Everything that followed flowed from that delight.

The stars were not merely placed into the heavens to illuminate the night. They became silent witnesses to generosity.

The oceans spoke of abundance.

The mountains proclaimed steadfastness.

Every flower whispered beauty without demanding recognition.

Everything bore the fingerprints of a Creator who gives more than necessity requires.

Then, in the midst of this overflowing generosity, humanity appeared.

Not as slaves.

Not as servants earning approval.

Not as an experiment waiting to succeed or fail.

But as sons and daughters, fashioned in the image of the One whose very nature is Love.

The first words spoken over humanity were not correction.

They were blessing.

The first experience of humanity was not fear.
It was welcome.
The first home was not built by human hands.
It was prepared by divine affection.
Perhaps this is why Eden has remained the deepest longing of every human heart.
Every longing for belonging...
Every desire to be fully known without being rejected...
Every hope that there is still goodness beneath the brokenness of our world...
These are not accidental emotions.
They are echoes.
Something within us remembers what our minds have forgotten.
Not necessarily the geography of a garden, but the atmosphere of Presence.
There was no need to hide because nothing separated humanity from the Father's delight.
There was no competition because worth had never been questioned.
There was no shame because love had never been measured by performance.
Humanity did not wake each morning wondering whether God still accepted them.
Love required no negotiation.
Acceptance required no achievement.
Communion required no permission.
This was Eden.
Not merely a place.
A way of being.
A way of seeing.
A way of knowing.
Perhaps that is why Scripture begins in a garden and ends in a garden-city.
The story has never been about returning to yesterday.
It has always been moving toward the fulfillment of the Father's original intent.
Eden is not the destination of nostalgia.
It is the destiny of creation.

And every step Jesus took was leading humanity toward that fulfillment.

Not backward into innocence.

Forward into communion freely chosen.

Love desired sons and daughters who could answer His invitation with freedom rather than necessity.

Only love that is freely given can be freely returned.

Perhaps this is why freedom was present in Eden from the beginning.

Without freedom there can be obedience.

There cannot be love.

The Father did not risk creating free humanity because He underestimated the cost.

He accepted the cost because communion was worth it.

The Cross was never God's emergency plan.

It was the fullest revelation of a Love that had already determined, before the foundations of the world, that nothing would ultimately prevent Him from dwelling with His beloved.

That is where our story begins.

Not with failure.

Not with exile.

But with Love.

Chapter Two - The Question That Changed Everything

Every story has a turning point.

The turning point of Eden was not a piece of fruit.

It was a question.

“Did God really say...?”

At first glance, the question seems innocent.

It sounds like an invitation to think more carefully.

But hidden within those few words was the oldest temptation humanity has ever faced.

The serpent was not primarily questioning God's command.

He was questioning God's character.

Can the One who created you really be trusted?

Does He truly desire your flourishing?
Is His goodness as complete as it appears?
Or, is He withholding something essential from you?
That ancient conversation has never ended.
Its echoes still whisper through every generation.
Can God really be trusted?
Will He still love me if I fail?
Must I earn what He freely offers?
Will He eventually grow weary of me?
Is His grace enough?
These questions reveal that Eden is not merely behind us.
Its struggle continues within us.
Notice what happened next.
The moment trust gave way to suspicion; humanity's eyes were opened—but not in the way they expected.
They became aware of themselves.
The first thing they saw was not God.
It was their own vulnerability.
Shame entered quietly.
Fear followed close behind.
And love, though unchanged, suddenly seemed uncertain.
Nothing in the Father's heart had shifted.
The change occurred within the hearts of His children.
The One who had always delighted in walking with them now appeared frightening.
Not because He had become less loving...
But because fear had distorted their vision.
How often have we done the same?
We imagine disappointment where there is compassion.
We expect rejection where there is welcome.

We brace ourselves for punishment when the Father's heart is already moving toward restoration.

Fear has a remarkable ability to rewrite the face of Love.

It convinces us that distance exists where communion is being offered.

It whispers that hiding is safer than honesty.

It persuades us that our coverings are more dependable than grace.

So Adam and Eve stitched together fig leaves.

Not because God demanded them.

Because shame did.

Humanity has been sewing fig leaves ever since.

We hide behind achievement.

Behind religion.

Behind knowledge.

Behind success.

Behind failure.

Behind carefully constructed identities.

Anything that keeps us from standing uncovered before Love.

Yet the Father does something astonishing.

He comes walking.

He does not wait for humanity to find its way back.

He moves toward those who are hiding.

The sound of His footsteps fills the garden.

The same footsteps that once brought delight now awaken fear.

What changed?

Not the Father.

Only the story humanity had begun telling itself about Him.

Then comes one of the most beautiful questions in all of Scripture.

"Where are you?"

The Creator is not asking for information.

Love never asks unnecessary questions.

He is inviting awareness.

He is calling His children out of hiding.

He is saying, in effect,

“My beloved, where has fear taken you?

Where has shame convinced you to live?

Come out...

You no longer need to hide from Me.”

Perhaps every page of Scripture after Eden is another expression of that same invitation.

Prophets.

Priests.

Kings.

Poets.

Wisdom.

The Tabernacle.

The Temple.

The Incarnation.

The Cross.

The empty tomb.

Pentecost.

Each speaks with one voice.

“Come out.

Come home.

I am still here.”

The tragedy of Eden was never that the Father stopped drawing near.

The tragedy was that humanity believed He had.

The Gospel begins where that lie finally ends.

Chapter Three - The God We Thought We Knew

There is a question that quietly lives beneath every human question.

It is not,

“Does God exist?”

Nor is it,

“What happens after I die?”

Beneath every theological debate...

Every religious tradition...

Every fear...

Every hope...

There is a simpler question.

“What is God really like?”

How we answer that question shapes everything.

If we believe God is distant, we will keep our distance.

If we believe He is easily angered, we will approach Him cautiously.

If we believe His love must be earned, we will spend our lives trying to deserve what can only be received.

Our image of God becomes the atmosphere in which our souls learn to breathe.

Perhaps this is why the serpent’s first question was so devastating.

He did not begin by tempting humanity with pleasure.

He began by inviting humanity to question the Father’s heart.

Every lie since then has simply been another version of the same deception:

“Perhaps God is not as good as He seems.”

History bears witness to what happens when that suspicion takes root.

Fear creates religion built upon appeasement.

Shame produces endless striving.

Power justifies violence.

People begin speaking in God’s name while no longer resembling His heart.

And still the Father keeps moving toward His children.

Throughout the Scriptures we encounter moments of breathtaking beauty alongside passages that leave us deeply unsettled.

Some stories fill us with hope.

Others leave us asking difficult questions.

Faith has never required us to pretend those questions do not exist.

Perhaps mature faith begins when we have enough courage to ask them honestly.

For generations, thoughtful believers have wrestled with the tension.

How do we reconcile passages that appear to portray divine violence with the God revealed in Jesus Christ?

How do we understand commands that seem inconsistent with the One who taught us to love our enemies?

These are not questions born from unbelief.

They arise because we take Jesus seriously.

The Gospel of John records these remarkable words:

“No one has ever seen God. The only begotten Son... has made Him known.”

Later Jesus tells Philip,

“Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father.”

Those words invite us into a profound way of reading Scripture.

Not by dismissing what came before...

But by allowing everything to find its fulfillment in Christ.

Jesus does not stand in opposition to the story of Israel.

He stands as its fulfillment.

Its clearest revelation.

Its unveiled face.

If we wish to know what the Father is like, we do not begin with our fears.

We begin with Jesus.

Watch Him.

He touches those others avoided.

He speaks with those religion excluded.

He receives children without hesitation.

He restores those shame had pushed to the margins.

He weeps at the tomb of His friend.

He forgives those who crucify Him.

Again and again, He reveals a God who would rather bear violence than answer it with violence.

A God whose strength is not diminished by humility.

A God whose holiness is not threatened by compassion.

A God who enters our suffering instead of remaining distant from it.

This is not a new God.

This is the Father who has always been.

Jesus did not come to change the Father's heart.

He came to remove the veil from ours.

And perhaps that is the beginning of every true return to Eden.

Not discovering a different God...

But finally seeing the One who has been walking toward us from the very beginning.

Chapter Four - The God Who Keeps Coming

If there is one thread woven through every page of Scripture, it is this:

The Creator-Father keeps coming...

Humanity hides.

The Father comes...

Humanity wanders.

The Father comes...

Humanity builds walls.

The Father comes...

The story is astonishing not because humanity continually reaches for God, but because God continually reaches for humanity.

After Eden, we might expect silence.

We might expect distance.

We might imagine that holiness could no longer tolerate brokenness.
Instead, we find something altogether unexpected.
The Creator begins moving toward the very people who are moving away from Him.
He *clothes* Adam and Eve.
He *calls* Abraham.
He *walks* with Jacob.
He *speaks* through Moses.
He *dwells* among Israel in the wilderness.
The cloud by day.
The fire by night.
The Tabernacle standing in the midst of the camp.
What was the Tabernacle except another declaration of the Father's heart?
"I still desire to dwell with you."
Later, the Temple rises in Jerusalem.
Its stones are magnificent.
Its courts inspire awe.
Yet even the Temple whispers the same longing as the Garden.
"*I desire to be with My people.*"
The prophets echo that longing.
Again and again they call Israel back, not merely to obedience, but to relationship.
When they speak of judgment, it is never judgment for its own sake.
It is the painful language of Love pursuing those who have forgotten who they are.
The prophets dream of a day when hearts of stone become hearts of flesh.
When the knowledge of God covers the earth as the waters cover the sea.
When swords become plowshares.
When justice and peace embrace.
When every tear is wiped away.
Their hope is not simply for better behavior.
Their hope is for restored communion.

The Father has always desired more than compliance.

He has desired communion.

Religion often settles for conformity.

Love longs for intimacy.

There is a profound difference.

Conformity can exist without affection.

Obedience can exist without trust.

Ritual can exist without relationship.

But communion changes everything.

Communion does not merely shape our actions.

It transforms our hearts.

Perhaps this is why Jesus summarized the Law so simply.

Love God.

Love your neighbor.

He was not reducing the Law.

He was revealing its heartbeat.

Love had always been the intention.

Communion had always been the destination.

The Garden.

The Tabernacle.

The Temple.

The Prophets.

None of these were the destination.

They were signposts.

Each one pointed beyond itself.

Each one whispered,

“He is still coming.”

Then, in what may be the most breathtaking moment in history, the longing of Eden takes on flesh.

Not another command.

Not another stone tablet.

Not another prophet standing at a distance.

God with us.

Immanuel.

The One who had walked in the cool of the garden now walked the dusty roads of Galilee.

The One who once called, “Where are you?” now sat at tables with tax collectors, embraced children, touched those whom everyone else avoided, and looked into the eyes of fearful people without condemnation.

Love had come closer than anyone imagined possible.

The Garden had not been forgotten.

It had been quietly moving toward its fulfillment.

Perhaps this is what John meant when he wrote,

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

The language is not accidental.

The God who once dwelt in a garden...

Then in a tent...

Then in a temple...

Now dwells in a human life.

The Presence has always been drawing nearer.

And every step has carried humanity closer to home.

Chapter Five - The Cross and the Father's Heart

There is perhaps no symbol in human history more recognized than the cross.

It hangs from necklaces.

It stands upon church steeples.

It is carved into stone, painted onto canvas, and carried into places of suffering throughout the world.

Yet for all its familiarity, perhaps we have still not fully asked its most important question.

What does the cross reveal about God?

For centuries, much of the conversation has centered upon what happened at the cross.

Necessary questions.

Important questions.

Questions worthy of careful reflection.

But before we ask what happened...

Perhaps we should first ask what was seen.

Because Jesus Himself said,

“When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to Myself.”

Lifted up for what purpose?

To reveal the Father.

Throughout His life Jesus had been answering one question.

What is God like?

Every healing was an answer.

Every embrace was an answer.

Every act of forgiveness was an answer.

Every shared meal was an answer.

Then came the cross.

If everything Jesus had done revealed the Father, then surely the cross cannot reveal someone different.

The cross is not an interruption of God’s character.

It is its fullest unveiling.

Look carefully.

The Father does not answer hatred with hatred.

Violence is not conquered by greater violence.

Love absorbs what evil inflicts without surrendering to its spirit.

This is divine strength unlike anything the world had imagined.

Human empires establish themselves through power.

The Kingdom of God reveals itself through self-giving love.
The world crowns kings with gold.
Love wears a crown of thorns.
The world protects itself by destroying enemies.
Love stretches out its hands and prays,
“Father, forgive them.”
If we wish to know what omnipotence looks like, we need only look toward Calvary.
Power refuses retaliation.
Holiness refuses contempt.
Mercy refuses abandonment.
Justice refuses indifference.
Love refuses to stop loving.
The cross does not persuade the Father to become merciful.
It reveals the mercy that has always lived within the Father’s heart.
Nor does it reveal a divided God, as though one part desired wrath while another pleaded for compassion.
The Father and the Son are not standing on opposite sides of humanity.
Together they stand against everything that destroys humanity.
The cross is not the collision of justice and love.
It is their perfect harmony.
Justice is not abandoned.
It is fulfilled through restorative love.
Mercy is not sentimentality.
It is love entering the deepest wounds of creation in order to heal them from within.
This is why Jesus refuses to answer violence with violence.
Had He done so, He would simply have confirmed the world’s oldest belief—that power ultimately belongs to whoever can inflict the greatest harm.
Instead, He unveils another Kingdom.
A Kingdom where forgiveness is stronger than revenge.

Where humility is greater than domination.
Where death itself cannot extinguish life.
At Calvary, humanity finally sees what has always been true.
The Father is exactly like Jesus.
He has always been.
The One who walked through Eden calling,
“Where are you?”
is the same One who now speaks from a cross,
“Father, forgive them.”
The voice has never changed.
Only our ability to hear it.
Perhaps this is why the veil was torn.
Not merely because heaven had opened.
But because every false image of God had begun to unravel.
The God whom many feared to approach had stepped into our suffering.
The Holy One had entered our violence.
The Creator had embraced His creation, even as His creation rejected Him.
This is not defeat.
This is Love refusing to become anything other than Love.
And once we have seen that Love...
Fear begins to lose its voice.
Shame begins to loosen its grip.
Hiding no longer makes sense.
The journey back to Eden does not begin when we become worthy.
It begins when we finally believe what the cross has always been saying.
“You have never been beyond the reach of My love.”
Perhaps that has always been the message written in the wounds of Christ.
Not merely that God can forgive.
But that God has never ceased moving toward His beloved.

And once Love has been seen for what it truly is...

The only reasonable response is to step out from behind the trees.

Chapter Six - The Kingdom Within

If Eden was the place where humanity walked with God...

Then where is Eden now?

For many years I imagined it as something behind us.

A beautiful beginning that humanity tragically forfeited.

Then I imagined it as something waiting beyond death.

A distant destination we would someday inherit.

But what if both assumptions miss something astonishing?

What if Eden has always been pointing toward something greater?

Jesus spoke about the Kingdom more than any other subject.

People expected Him to describe a political revolution.

Others expected heavenly geography.

Instead, He quietly said,

“The Kingdom of God is within you.”

What an astonishing declaration.

Not merely among you.

Not merely near you.

Within you.

Perhaps the Garden was never intended to remain a geographical place.

Perhaps it was always preparing humanity for a deeper dwelling.

The Father’s Presence would no longer be encountered in one sacred location.

His dwelling would become His people.

Could this explain the beautiful progression woven throughout Scripture?

The Garden.

The Tabernacle.

The Temple.

The Christ.

The Church.

The human heart.

Each movement brings the Presence closer.

Each chapter of redemption removes another veil.

Each covenant whispers,

"I desire to dwell with you."

This has always been the Father's dream.

Not visitors.

Family.

Not servants.

Children.

Not fearful worshipers standing at a distance.

Beloved sons and daughters learning to live in communion.

I have come to believe that this changes how we understand spiritual life.

For many of us, Christianity became primarily about going somewhere after death.

Jesus seemed far more interested in teaching us how to live before death.

He spoke of seeds.

Birds.

Lilies.

Children.

Vineyards.

Banquets.

Bread.

Light.

Living water.

Everything He touched became an invitation to awaken.

Perhaps eternal life is not merely endless duration.

Could it be that eternal life is participation in the very life of God?

A quality of life.

A communion that begins now.

This does not diminish heaven.

It allows heaven to begin doing what Jesus taught us to pray for.

“Your Kingdom come.

Your will be done.

On earth as it is in heaven.”

Notice where the prayer begins.

Not after death.

Today.

Here.

Now.

Perhaps this is why Presence changes everything.

Presence cannot be manufactured.

It cannot be forced.

It cannot be earned.

Presence is received.

When we become still enough to recognize the Father’s nearness, something within us begins remembering.

Not new information.

Ancient belonging.

The soul recognizes what the mind has forgotten.

This is why silence becomes sacred.

Why forgiveness becomes freedom.

Why compassion heals both the giver and the receiver.

Why grace feels strangely familiar.

We are not learning a foreign language.

We are remembering our native tongue.

Love.

Perhaps this explains why the Apostle Paul could say,

“In Him we live and move and have our being.”

Not someday.

Now.

The Kingdom is not an escape from the world.

It is learning to see the world through the eyes of communion.

The *ordinary* becomes *holy*.

The *stranger* becomes *neighbor*.

The *wounded* become *teachers*.

Meals become *sacraments*.

Tears become *prayers*.

Every *sunrise* becomes another *invitation* to begin again.

Perhaps this is what Eden always intended.

Not that humanity would forever remain in one garden.

But that the whole earth would become filled with people who carry the Presence wherever they go.

Every act of kindness plants another tree.

Every word of mercy waters another garden.

Every life surrendered to Love becomes another place where heaven touches earth.

Could it be...

This is what Jesus meant when He said,

“The Kingdom of God is within you.”

And if that is true...

Then perhaps Eden has been growing quietly inside us all along.

Chapter Seven - Remembering Who We Are

There is something remarkable about children.

They do not spend their earliest years questioning whether they possess worth.

They simply receive life.

They laugh without permission.

They wonder without embarrassment.

They trust until trust is broken.

Perhaps this is why Jesus placed a child in the midst of His disciples and quietly said,

“Unless you become like little children...”

He was not inviting us to become childish.

He was inviting us to remember.

Perhaps Eden was humanity’s childhood.

Not childishness...

But complete trust.

The child does not awaken each morning asking,

“Must I earn my father’s love today?”

The beloved simply awakens into affection.

Could it be that this was the atmosphere of Eden?

Identity was never achieved.

It was received.

Adam did not introduce himself to God.

God introduced Adam to himself.

“You are Mine.”

Before humanity ever accomplished anything...

Before dominion...

Before vocation...

Before stewardship...

Before even naming the animals...

There was relationship.

Love spoke identity before humanity demonstrated usefulness.

How different this is from the world we inherited.

From our earliest memories we begin collecting identities.

Successful.

Failure.

Accepted.

Rejected.

Smart.

Broken.

Religious.

Unworthy.

We spend years allowing our wounds to answer the question,

“Who am I?”

Yet wounds were never intended to become mirrors.

Perhaps this is why shame is so destructive.

Shame does not merely tell us that we have done something wrong.

Shame whispers that we are something wrong.

It quietly replaces belovedness with performance.

Communion with comparison.

Wonder with self-consciousness.

Could it be that humanity has spent thousands of years trying to become what the Father declared us to be from the beginning?

Beloved.

Jesus seems entirely free from this struggle.

He never appears anxious about proving Himself.

He serves without insecurity.

He loves without fear.

He confronts without hatred.

He withdraws without guilt.

Even in rejection He remains rooted in the Father’s delight.

Why?

Because His identity is received.

Not manufactured.

Before His public ministry...

Before a single miracle...

Before a sermon...

Before the cross...

The Father's voice declares,

"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Notice the timing.

The affirmation comes before the accomplishment.

Could it be that the Father has always spoken this way?

Perhaps we have imagined God waiting for us to become worthy before calling us beloved.

Jesus reveals something entirely different.

Belovedness is where transformation begins.

Not where it ends.

Love is not the reward for becoming whole.

Love is what makes wholeness possible.

This changes everything.

We no longer obey in order to become sons and daughters.

We learn obedience because we already are.

We no longer seek the Father's acceptance.

We live from it.

We no longer strive to earn communion.

We awaken to the communion that has been waiting for us all along.

I have come to believe that salvation is, in many ways, the remembering of our truest identity.

Not remembering with the mind alone.

Remembering with the heart.

The prodigal son did not become a son when he returned home.

He was a son in the far country.

He was a son while feeding pigs.

He was a son while rehearsing his apology.
His return did not create his identity.
It awakened him to it.
Could it be that this is our story as well?
Perhaps the Father has never forgotten who we are.
Perhaps we are the ones learning to remember.
And as remembrance grows...
Fear begins to loosen its grip.
Comparison loses its voice.
Shame quietly releases its hold.
The coverings we have worn for so many years begin to fall away.
Not because someone tears them from us.
But because Love has made them unnecessary.
This is what it means to come home.
Not becoming someone new...
But becoming who Love has always known us to be.
Perhaps this is why the Apostle John could write,
“Beloved, now we are the children of God...”
Not someday.
Now.
The journey back to Eden is, at its heart, the journey back to belovedness.
The Father’s voice has never ceased speaking.
The only question is whether we have become still enough to hear it once again.
“You are My beloved.”
Perhaps those words have been echoing through the Garden from the very beginning.

Chapter Eight - Living Without Hiding

There is a curious thing about light.
It never argues with darkness.

It simply appears.

Darkness has no power to overcome light because darkness has no existence of its own. It is merely the absence of light.

Could it be that fear is much the same?

Perhaps fear has felt so powerful because we have mistaken its shadow for substance.

The moment love is trusted, fear begins to lose the only power it has ever possessed.

The Apostle John writes,

“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.”

Notice what he does not say.

He does not say that perfect effort casts out fear.

Nor perfect theology.

Nor perfect morality.

Love.

Only Love.

Perhaps this is why the Father has never attempted to frighten humanity into communion.

Fear may produce compliance.

It cannot produce intimacy.

Love has always desired something deeper than obedience.

Love desires friendship.

Could it be that this is why Jesus no longer called His disciples servants?

“I have called you friends.”

Friendship is impossible where fear remains.

Friends do not hide behind masks.

Friends are known.

Friends trust.

Friends remain together even when silence fills the room.

This was Eden.

Not perfection.

Presence.

Perhaps we have misunderstood holiness.
For many years I imagined holiness as distance from brokenness.
Jesus seemed to imagine holiness differently.
His holiness drew Him toward brokenness.
Toward lepers.
Toward grieving mothers.
Toward frightened fishermen.
Toward tax collectors.
Toward those everyone else had decided were beyond hope.
Could it be that holiness is not withdrawal from the world, but perfect love within it?
Perhaps this is why Jesus was never anxious about becoming unclean.
Love is not diminished by entering another's suffering.
Love transforms suffering from within.
I have come to believe that hiding is the oldest habit of the human soul.
Sometimes we hide behind success.
Sometimes behind failure.
Sometimes behind knowledge.
Sometimes behind religion.
Sometimes behind busyness.
Sometimes even behind ministry.
Anything can become a fig leaf when it keeps us from being fully known.
Yet the Father's invitation has never changed.
"Come into the light."
Not to expose us to shame.
But to free us from it.
There is a profound difference.
Shame says,
"If they truly knew you, they would leave."
Love says,

"I already know you, and I have never left."

One voice produces hiding.

The other produces rest.

Perhaps this is why confession is so beautiful.

Confession is not informing God of what He does not know.

It is stepping out from behind the trees.

It is agreeing that hiding has become unnecessary.

The Father was never waiting for information.

He was waiting for trust.

Could it be that repentance itself has often been misunderstood?

The ancient word invites us to change our minds.

To see differently.

To awaken.

Perhaps repentance begins the moment we stop believing the lie that we are unwanted.

Perhaps forgiveness begins the moment we trust that we have always been welcomed.

Everything changes when the Father's face is no longer imagined through fear.

Prayer becomes conversation.

Obedience becomes delight.

Worship becomes gratitude.

Service becomes generosity.

Faith becomes resting.

The Kingdom quietly grows wherever people no longer need to hide.

Homes become gardens.

Meals become communion.

Strangers become neighbors.

Enemies become people for whom Christ also died.

The *ordinary* becomes *holy* because Love has entered it.

Perhaps Eden has never been waiting for us beyond the horizon.

Could it be that Eden appears wherever fear gives way to trust...

where shame gives way to belovedness...

where hiding gives way to Presence.

I have come to believe that every act of genuine love is another step through the garden.

And every step taken with the Father is already home.

Chapter Nine - The Table in the Garden

There is one image that continues to appear throughout the Scriptures.

A table.

It appears beneath the oaks of Mamre as Abraham welcomes mysterious guests.

It appears in the wilderness as manna falls each morning.

It appears in David's songs.

"You prepare a table before me..."

It appears in the prophets who speak of a feast for all peoples.

It appears in the upper room where Jesus breaks bread.

It appears again on a shoreline where the risen Christ prepares breakfast for weary fishermen.

And finally...

It appears in the closing pages of Scripture.

The marriage supper.

Perhaps this is not accidental.

Perhaps the Kingdom has always been a table.

A place where enemies become family.

Where strangers become neighbors.

Where no one earns a seat because every seat is a gift.

Could it be that the table is Eden continued?

Notice how often Jesus taught around meals.

He was accused of eating with sinners.

Religious people considered this scandalous.

Jesus seemed to consider it normal.

The table became His classroom.

Bread became His sermon.

Wine became His promise.

Presence became His method.

Perhaps the deepest miracle was not that Jesus multiplied bread.

Perhaps it was that He continually made room for people who believed there was no room for them.

The Kingdom has always had another chair.

Another place setting.

Another welcome.

I have come to believe that this is what communion truly remembers.

Not simply a historical event.

A living reality.

We do not gather merely to remember Christ.

We gather because Christ is already present among us.

Every shared loaf quietly proclaims,

"There is enough."

Every shared cup whispers,

"You belong."

Every meal received with gratitude becomes an echo of Eden.

Think about the first meal.

Humanity reached for food believing that God was withholding life.

Think about the last meal before the Cross.

God offers Himself as food, declaring that He has never withheld life.

The first meal was born from suspicion.

The second from self-giving love.

Could it be that redemption is the healing of the human table?

No longer grasping.

Receiving.

No longer hiding.

Sharing.

No longer competing.

Belonging.

Perhaps this is why hospitality is one of the holiest acts we can offer another human being.

Whenever we make room for someone...

Whenever we listen without rushing...

Whenever we receive another person's story without judgment...

Whenever we refuse to reduce someone to the worst chapter of their life...

The table grows larger.

The Kingdom becomes visible.

The Garden blossoms again.

Perhaps Heaven is not first recognized by streets of gold.

Perhaps it is recognized by hearts that have finally learned to welcome one another.

The Father has always been preparing a place.

Not merely beyond history.

Within history.

Within us.

Within every act of mercy.

Within every reconciliation.

Within every table where Love becomes visible.

Could it be that every meal received with gratitude is already a foretaste of eternity?

Perhaps this is why Jesus simply kept inviting people to eat.

Because love is difficult to understand from a distance.

But around a table...

Love becomes tangible.

Hands pass bread.

Eyes meet.

Stories are told.

Forgiveness becomes possible.
Laughter returns.
Children are welcomed.
The lonely discover family.
And suddenly...
Without anyone announcing it...
The Garden has appeared again.
Not because we escaped the world.
Because the Presence transformed it.
Perhaps Eden has always been one shared meal away.

Welcome Home

If you have walked with me this far, perhaps you have already sensed it.
This book was never really about Eden.

It was about the Father's heart.
Eden simply gave us our first glimpse of that heart.
The Garden was not merely the beginning of humanity's story.
It was the unveiling of the Creator's desire.
A Father walking with His children.
A home where nothing needed to be hidden.
A place where shame had never learned our names.
A life where Love was trusted without question.
Perhaps that is why the story has never released its hold upon us.
Somewhere beneath our fears...
Beneath our accomplishments...
Beneath our failures...
Beneath every identity we have constructed...

There remains a quiet longing.

We call it peace.

We call it belonging.

We call it home.

Could it be that this longing is not asking us to discover something new?

Could it be that it is inviting us to remember something eternal?

The world has taught us many things.

It has taught us how to compete.

How to accumulate.

How to protect ourselves.

How to hide.

How to survive.

The Father has always been teaching something different.

How to trust.

How to receive.

How to forgive.

How to become fully alive.

How to love without fear.

Perhaps that is what Jesus meant when He invited the weary to come unto Him.

Rest is not simply the absence of labor.

Rest is the absence of hiding.

I have come to believe that this is the Gospel.

Not merely that our sins may be forgiven.

Glorious as that is.

But that fear no longer has the final word.

That shame no longer determines our identity.

That separation no longer defines our relationship with the Father.

Christ has entered our darkness.

Love has spoken more loudly than fear.

The veil has been torn.
The invitation remains.
Come home.
Not because God has finally become willing to receive you.
Because He never ceased receiving you.
Not because you have finally become worthy.
Because Love never waited for worthiness before calling you beloved.
Perhaps the greatest miracle is not that humanity finally found God.
Perhaps the greatest miracle is discovering that God was never lost.
He was always the One walking toward us.
Even now...
Can you hear Him?
Not the sound of accusation.
Not the footsteps of an angry judge.
Not the approach of One keeping record of every failure.
Listen carefully.
They are the same footsteps that echoed through the Garden.
The same footsteps that walked the roads of Galilee.
The same footsteps that carried a cross.
The same footsteps that left an empty tomb.
The same Presence that now whispers within every human heart,
“I am with you.”
The question has never changed.
“Where are you?”
Not because the Father cannot find His children.
Because Love always invites an answer.
Perhaps all of life has been preparing us to speak the simplest words we have ever spoken.
No excuses.
No fig leaves.

No rehearsed apologies.

No bargaining.

Only truth.

Only trust.

Only surrender.

“Here I am.”

And in that moment we discover something that changes everything.

We did not return to Eden alone.

The Father walked every step with us.

Perhaps He always has.

Perhaps He always will.

For this is the promise that has echoed through every covenant...

Every prophet...

Every promise...

Every tear...

Every sunrise...

“I will be with you.”

Immanuel.

God with us.

Not merely until we fail.

Not merely until we doubt.

Not merely until we die.

With us.

Always.

And perhaps...

That has always been Eden.

Welcome home.

“I AM here.”

The Blessing

May you hear the Father's footsteps without fear.

May shame lose its voice before Love.

May every sunrise remind you that His mercies are new.

May every table become a place of belonging.

May every stranger become your neighbor.

May every wound become a doorway to compassion.

May every act of Presence plant another tree in the Garden.

May you discover, again and again, that you have never walked alone.

And may you come to believe that before your first breath, after your final breath, and in every breath between, the Creator-Father has been whispering the same words:

"You are My beloved."

Welcome home.

The Sending

If these pages have done their work...

You may discover that very little has changed.

The mountains remain.

The rivers continue to flow.

Morning still follows the longest night.

Children still laugh.

The lonely still ache.

The grieving still weep.

The hungry still wait.

The world still groans for healing.

Outwardly...

Everything may appear the same.

Yet perhaps everything has changed.

Not because the world is different.
Because you have begun to see differently.
Perhaps this has always been the miracle.
The Kingdom does not begin when creation changes.
The Kingdom begins when our eyes do.
Could it be that this is what Jesus meant when He so often said,
“Those who have eyes to see...”
He was not merely speaking about vision.
He was speaking about perception.
Seeing the Father’s heart where fear once imagined judgment.
Seeing belovedness where shame once whispered rejection.
Seeing possibility where despair declared the story finished.
Seeing Christ where others see only strangers.
I have come to believe that every transformation in history began because someone learned to see differently.
Moses saw holy ground in an ordinary desert.
David saw a shepherd’s sling where others saw a giant.
Mary saw a promise where others would have seen impossibility.
The disciples eventually saw a cross where the world saw failure.
Then they saw an empty tomb where the world expected permanence.
Perhaps today the Father asks us to see again.
To see every human being as someone already loved.
To see every interruption as an invitation.
To see every conversation as sacred ground.
To see every meal as communion.
To see every sunrise as another declaration that mercy has not grown weary.
To see ourselves not as frightened exiles...
But as beloved sons and daughters learning once again to walk with our Father.
The world does not need more people who have all the answers.

The world longs for people whose presence carries peace.
People who enter rooms without needing to control them.
People who listen before speaking.
People who heal without drawing attention to themselves.
People who forgive because they know they are forgiven.
People who love because Love has first loved them.
Perhaps this is what it means to become an image-bearer.
Not merely believing certain truths about God.
But allowing the Father's heart to become visible through our lives.
Then every place becomes a garden.
Hospitals.
Classrooms.
Funeral homes.
Neighborhoods.
Prisons.
Dining room tables.
Waiting rooms.
Coffee shops.
Everywhere a son or daughter remembers who they are...
The Garden quietly begins to bloom again.
You may never preach to thousands.
You may never write a book.
You may never become known beyond your family or your street.
Yet never underestimate the holiness of an ordinary life lived in extraordinary love.
One quiet act of compassion may become another person's turning point.
One patient conversation may restore hope to someone who had forgotten how to hope.
One moment of genuine presence may accomplish what years of arguments never could.
The Kingdom has always grown this way.
Like yeast.

Like seed.
Like light quietly entering darkness.
Almost unnoticed.
Until one day the whole field is covered with wheat.
The whole loaf has risen.
The whole forest stands where one small acorn once disappeared beneath the soil.
Do not despise the ordinary.
The Father never has.
He entered it.
He sanctified it.
He walks within it still.
So go gently.
Walk slowly enough to notice.
Listen deeply enough to understand.
Love courageously enough to remain present when others turn away.
Forgive freely.
Receive gratefully.
Laugh often.
Weep honestly.
Remain teachable.
Hold truth with humility.
Hold conviction with kindness.
Hold mystery without fear.
And wherever you go...
Leave the fragrance of Christ behind you.
Perhaps someone will never remember your words.
But they may never forget how safe they felt in your presence.
If that becomes true...
Then another tree has taken root.

Another table has been prepared.
Another child has remembered they are beloved.
Another corner of creation has begun to resemble Eden once again.
And perhaps...
That is enough.
More than enough.
For the Creator-Father has never asked us to build His Kingdom.
He has simply invited us to walk with Him.
As He always has.
As He always will.
Until every tear is wiped away...
Every wound is healed...
Every table is full...
Every son and daughter is home...
And Love is all that remains.
Go in peace.
Walk in Presence.
Live in Love.
Welcome home.

“The pages that follow are not written to eliminate mystery. They are written to invite us deeper into it. I have come to believe that truth reaches its greatest beauty in holy tension—not the tension of contradiction, but the tension that refuses to diminish one aspect of God in order to protect another. If, at times, these pages leave you with more wonder than certainty, then perhaps they have accomplished exactly what I hoped.”

Your Friend, Carlo Griseta

I AM still here...