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All Men Should Be Farmers

A satirical take on Christian gender roles.

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Image: unitedsoybean / Flickr

Editor's note: From time to time, we hear complaints that Her.meneutics focuses too much on parenting. Or that the evangelical church as a whole overemphasizes or idolizes motherhood. In response, church history Professor Elesha Coffman offers the following "modest exegetical proposal." -- Kate Shellnutt, Her.meneutics editor

The Bible teaches that all men should be farmers. Farming is their calling, and they are biologically suited to it.

God tasked Adam with this work immediately after the Fall, as we read in Genesis 3:17-19: "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

Possession and cultivation of land were central to God's plan for Israel, and successful farming was the leading indication of God's blessing, as we read in Deuteronomy 11:8-15:

Observe therefore all the commands I am giving you today, so that you may have the strength to go in and take over the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, and so that you may live long in the land the Lord swore to your ancestors to give to them and their descendants, a land flowing with milk and honey. The land you are entering to take over is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you planted your seed and irrigated it by foot as in a vegetable garden. But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. It is a land the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end.

So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today—to love the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul— then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and

spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and olive oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied.

Farming is surely a noble calling. God himself is depicted as a livestock wrangler in Isaiah 1:3 (“The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner’s manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand”) and as a vineyard owner in the parable of the tenants, Luke 20:9-19.

That this noble agricultural labor is meant to be shared with all men is evident in the parables of the sower, the weeds, and the mustard seed, which appear in sequence in Matthew 13. Planting seeds and harvesting crops are the work of the kingdom.

Even from a practical standpoint, it is clear that all men should be farmers. Everyone needs to eat. What could possibly be more life-giving and life-affirming than food?

Additionally, as science reveals to us more and more every day, the quality of our food matters. Our health and happiness depend on the often unseen but vital loving care given by farmers to the soil, the plants, and the animals. If farmers falter in their work, we are all in danger.

“But wait!” you say. The curse in Genesis 3 didn’t circumscribe men’s vocational lives forever. God calls men to do many things other than farm. Some men are not physically or emotionally suited to farming, and lots of them, especially in our modern world, have no land to farm.

It would be disastrous for society, and for God’s kingdom, if men exercised only their gifts for farming while disdainful every other kind of work. Farming is noble, necessary, godly, and life-giving. It yields tremendous blessing. But it’s obviously not all that God intends for his sons.

Obviously.

Now substitute “women” for “men,” and “mothers” for “farmers.” Is the fallacy obvious now?

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