

Word count: 1909 Last edited by Pam on July 7, 2025 at 10:03 am

When I was nineteen, I thought I understood what a mission would be like. I had seen the videos, heard the stories, and imagined the glow of faithful, fulfilling service. But a few weeks into the field, I was already disoriented. It was harder than I'd ever expected—physically, emotionally, spiritually. That uncomfortable realization—that reality wasn't what I expected—turned out to be one of the greatest gifts of my life.

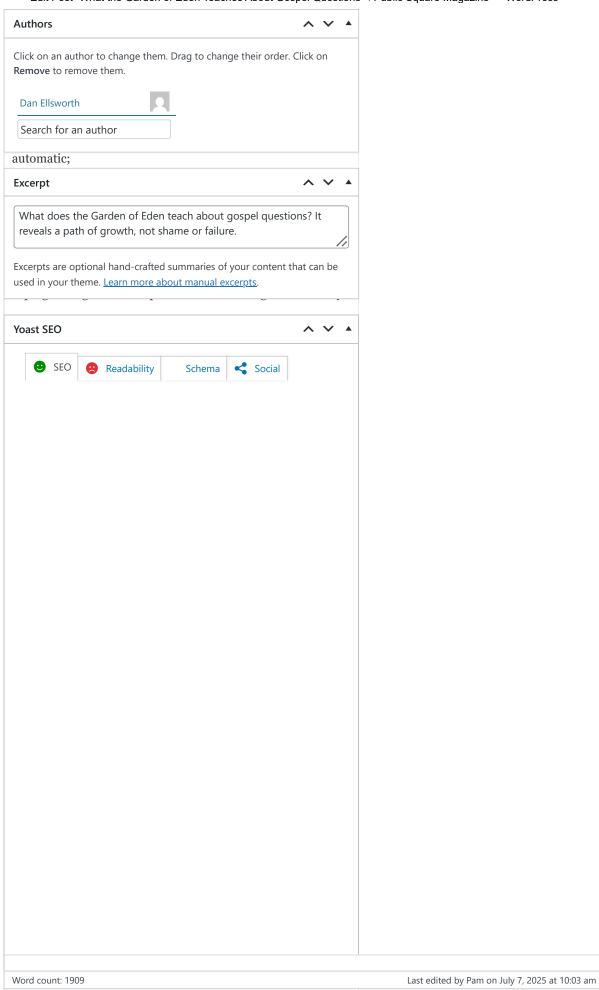
I now recognize that moment as a kind of Garden of Eden experience: a step out of innocence, into awareness. Into a world where nothing was automatic anymore. And it's the kind of transition we all make-sometimes in faith, sometimes in relationships, and sometimes in the middle of a quiet Sunday School class. [perfectpullquote align="right" bordertop="false" cite="" link="" color="" class="" size=""]I now recognize that moment as a kind of Garden of Eden experience: a step out of innocence, into awareness. Into a world where nothing was automatic anymore. [/perfectpullquote]In our June/July 2025 Come, Follow Me study, there is a reference to an important area of the Church's gospel library: Helping Others with Their Questions. It happens to be one of the most challenging gospel concepts for us to apply, because people who are asking gospel questions are on a developmental journey that neither we nor they might fully understand.

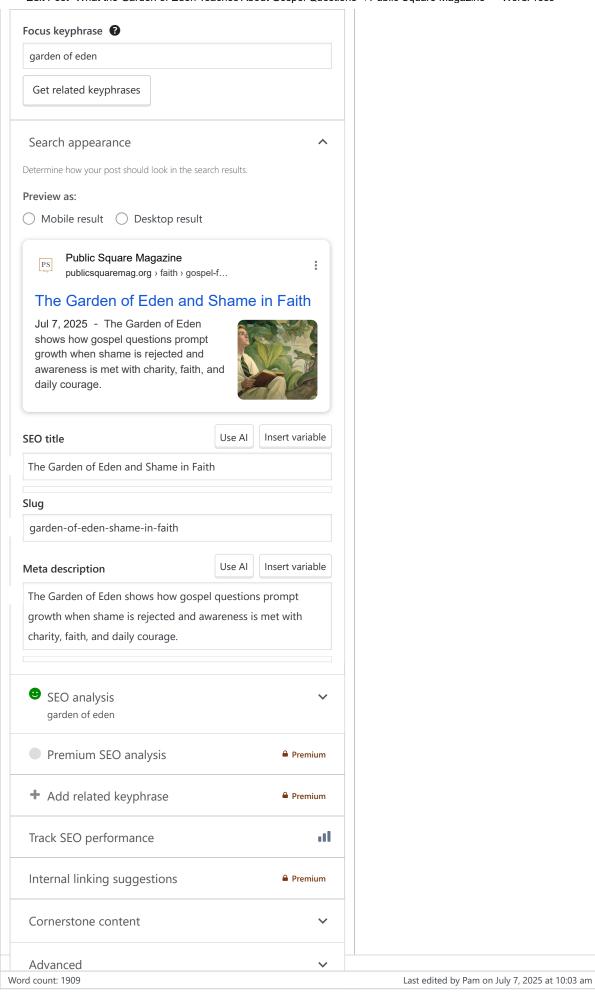
The Garden of Eden is a story that evokes a number of questions. In considering that story, we sometimes get hung up on particulars like the exact location of the garden; the relationship between the fall and death; God's language around male-female relationships; and more. These questions can be interesting, but they are peripheral to the intentions of the story. In the story of the Garden of Eden, believers are presented with a model for how we develop as human beings.

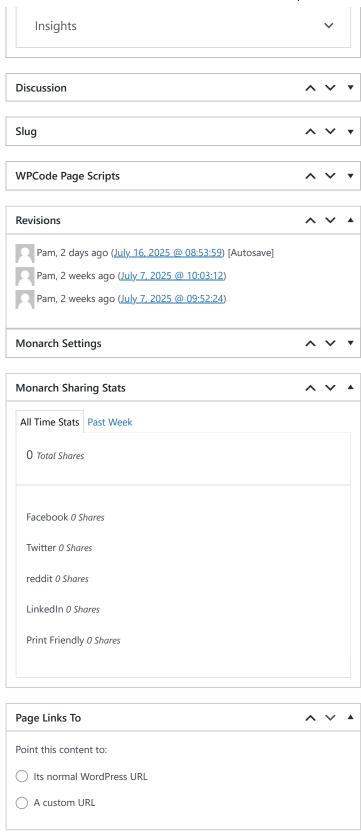
Age	Development	Underdevelopment
0-1	Trust	Mistrust
1-3	Autonomy	Shame/doubt
3-6	Initiative	Guilt
6-12	Industry	Inferiority
12-18	Identity	Role confusion
18-40	Intimacy	Isolation
40-60	Generativity	Stagnation
65+	Ego Integrity	Despair

Psychologists have long recognized that human development unfolds in stages. Erik Erikson, for example, mapped out a series of life phases—each with a key challenge that can lead either to growth or regression. Others, like Lawrence Kohlberg and James Fowler, explored how our moral reasoning and faith mature over time. While each model differs, they all

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