

INTRODUCTION

Let us begin with the reminder that chapter 1 is a litany of creation. In sharp contrast to the surrounding cultural and religious beliefs of the ancient near east, the God of Israel is sovereign, self-sufficient, and the supreme Creator of everything.

The creation of the universe culminates with the creation of human beings, who alone, are made in the image of Godself. God declares that the world and all that is in it, is not merely good, but *very* good. It is blessed and beloved by God. Chapter 2 continues, with the spotlight now on the creation of humanity.

Genesis 2:4-25

⁴This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

⁵Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, ⁶but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. ⁷Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

⁸Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. ⁹The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. ¹¹The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. ¹²(The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) ¹³The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. ¹⁴The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

¹⁸The LORD God said, *"It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."*

¹⁹Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. ²¹So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. ²²Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

²³The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."

²⁴That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

²⁵Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

[PRAY]

I've previously noted that the Bible is not written nor intended to be either a history book or a scientific book, but a book about God and our relationship with God. It is God's story and ours.

This is not to disavow the value of science, to be sure. In fact, science has come so far. Having mapped the human genome, one wonders where it will all lead. I read about two scientists in Great Britain, who had had success cloning sheep.

They said to God: "We don't need you anymore," they said. "We can make life by ourselves now."

"Okay," God replied, "let's have a man-making contest."

"All right," said the scientists. "We'll do it like you did in the beginning." When they began to reach down toward the ground, God's voice could be heard saying: "Hold it—make your own dirt!"

The destiny of human creation is to live and thrive in God's creation on God's terms. That last phrase—"on God's terms"—is the critical phrase, as we shall see.

God brought order out of chaos. God instituted boundaries within creation, between different kinds of plants and animals. This idea of boundaries—permission and prohibition will figure significantly in the story as we proceed.

Man is given responsibility to care for creation. Man is also given the job of naming the animals, which again speaks to the role of authority and dominion that is ours. There is a lot to do!

We learn more about the role of water and rivers, and the placement of man in the garden named Eden. The word “eden” means “delight” or “abundance”, both appropriate names for God’s creation.

The focus of the message today is on the creation of humanity. It seems an unlikely portrayal, of the God who called the universe into being, who now gets his hands dirty, in order to create man. I love this image because it conveys to us very personal involvement, the shaping of a person by Godself. Then the in-spiriting, or in-breathing life into the nostrils of the man God had formed—that is intimacy and closeness on an unprecedented scale. (And quite unlike the local pagan religions that believed man was birthed from the blood of a demon god or the offspring of two gods having sexual intercourse.)

Once having formed man and given him the job of tilling and keeping/caring for the garden, God institutes permission and prohibition. Man is given great responsibility and immense freedom-- *all* the vegetation and fruit of the trees are for man’s consumption and enjoyment with *one* exception.

Just one exception—eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil will incur immediate and dire consequences (v.17), death. One prohibition, but enormous freedom.

God sets boundaries of existences and by doing so, orders the world. It is the task of humanity to recognize these boundaries and live within them. Human nature, being what it is, we tend to focus on the one thing that is prohibited, versus the multitudes of things that are permitted! This fact of our propensity to push the boundaries, and our preoccupation with the forbidden, moves to the heart of the story. More about this next week!!

Now, in all the diversity of God's creation, in all its purity, beauty, and immense goodness, there is one thing that is decidedly NOT good! God declares it so in verse 18: **It is not good that man is alone.**

No doubt you've heard jokes similar to these:

Why did God create man before woman?

Because He didn't want any advice on how to do it. OR

God finished the creation of Adam, He stepped back, scratched His head and said, 'I can do better than that.'

Strictly speaking, man is not alone—Adam enjoyed God's companionship along with that of all the animals, birds, and the trees, flowers, rivers and more. And yet, God says it is not good. As amazing and as wonderful as all of that is, all of it is inadequate. It is not enough.

God's ideal is to create community. God lives in community as the holy trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, all of whom were active in creation. So, to be made in God's image must also mean that we are created for community.

The community that God creates involves similarity, and intimacy. God creates Eve as a "helper" or partner. The very word used here for "helper" (v.20) is elsewhere in the OT used of God, for God is the "helper" of his people. In another context, the word is translated "ally".

And so, God, in a fresh creative act, creates woman. Many have noted that she is created from his rib to be by man's side, not above or below but beside him, but next to his heart! Thus, God creates community in the midst of the garden.

It is notable that the first recorded words of man are quite astonishing. In crying out joyfully, "This at last is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" he is saying: "Here at last is a true equal. A companion. A partner. A friend. Someone I instinctively recognize—as precious, as priceless to me as my own flesh and bones, as my very self." (D. Tomas, Journey with Jesus, 9.10.2019)

The woman is valued for herself, without any reference to her role as child-bearer. She is the crowning achievement of creation! There is according to verse 25, a perfect ease and harmony present in the relationship of God with creation, with Adam and Eve and between these two persons made in God's image. Here is "shalom".

The narrative is interrupted with a word of commentary, v. 24.

²⁴*That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.*

This verse represents God's ideal for male-female relationships. This is God's original design and intention for marriage. It represents a unique reality of God's creation. Is it achievable? With God's help, yes. But what happens next—the disobedience of this newly minted couple—will skew God's intention, God's glorious ideal. Yes, some marriages will thrive and achieve this goal; others will struggle and fall apart. The impact of sin on all relationships will take its toll, and it will take its toll particular on marriage.

In Matthew 19 Jesus is asked by the Pharisees about divorce and why Moses allowed it. Jesus quotes these verses from Genesis 2 and said... *“Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.”* (Matthew 19:8)

God-given healthy sexual relationships have as much, if not more, to do with our hearts than our sex organs! God cares about right relationships. Too often relationships, and sexual relationships, in particular are twisted by power, manipulation, and exploitation—all of which stem from the hardening of the heart. This is the direct impact of sin, which we will deal with in Genesis chapter 3.

The Apostle Paul also references these verses in Ephesians 5:31-32.

³¹*“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”* ³²*This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.*

Notably, in Genesis 1: 26, it says:

²⁶*Then God said, “Let **us** make mankind in **our** image, in **our** likeness...”*

The Hebrew language has several names for God, and here two are used, Elohim and Yahweh. Both are translated “God” or LORD in English translations, but the word Elohim is plural, as are the pronouns in this sentence. God's self-reference plural: *“Let **us** make mankind in **our** image, in **our** likeness...”*

The point? The Holy Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—are all present and involved in creation. We believe that these three aspects of God's

person are distinct, yet one. And that they constitute a family of mutual love and harmony--a community!

If God's-self exists in community, if we are made in God's image, we too are intended to thrive within community!

God's intention for human relationships has far-reaching implications for us and for the church. It is indeed a profound mystery!

Marriage and family represent relationships that ideally, address the "not goodness" of being alone. However, not everyone marries. Marriages end in divorce or the death of a partner; not all marriages produce offspring.

Between 2014-2017 the US Surgeon General, Vice Admiral Murthy made this observation: The most common pathology I observed during this time in my patients was not heart disease or diabetes; it is loneliness. Over 40% of American adults report being lonely, and research suggests that the actual number is higher.

Loneliness and weak social connections are associated with a reduction in lifespan, similar to that caused by smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and even greater than the risks associated with obesity. Loneliness is associated with a greater risk of cardiovascular disease, dementia, depression and anxiety—to name a few!!

He concludes: "For our health (and for our work), it is imperative that we address the loneliness epidemic quickly." (Article in the Harvard Business Review, August 2017)

Unfortunately, I've seen little or no effort made to address this epidemic! It is something for which a doctor cannot simply write a prescription. "Take two of these each day, and you'll feel better." One cannot create a cure—one must *BE* the cure!

God knew from the beginning that being alone was the singular "not-good-thing" about God's entire creation!

The good news is that the community that God intends for us, is also addressed by our participation in the church! That said, it is not simply about showing up here

for worship each week, although that is important. It is about forming meaningful relationships—this is the critical part.

We of a family of faith. You and I are not alone! I trust that you experience a sense of belonging as we develop relationships in which we can give and receive mutual love and mutual support. Where each person is valued and needed. Without you, we are incomplete!

This is the good news...that we are not alone. God creates among us community—God has designed us for relationships, and it is God's intention for us to experience meaningful, purposeful relationships with God our Creator and Savior, and with one another within the church, the body of Christ.

May it be so!

[Pray]

Creator God: we are grateful that you are still creating—that we need not go through life alone. May Calvary be a place where new friendships are birthed regularly...By your Spirit, create in and among us a deep sense of community where all belong...where no one is lonely...where we can grow in faith and mutuality. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, may it be so! Amen!