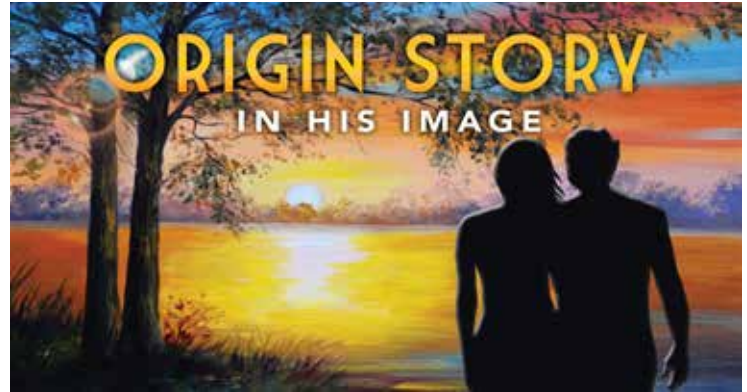


WEEK OF JULY 16



DAY
1

It's Not Good to be Alone **Genesis 2:18**

In Genesis 1, the verdict “it is good” occurs seven times. The final time it is VERY GOOD. Then in Genesis 2, for the first time we discover something that God says is NOT GOOD. What is not good in all of God’s good creation?

It is NOT GOOD to be alone.

To be made in the image of God is to be relational. God is a relational being. Father, Son, and Spirit are in an intimate relationship of love and friendship. Being made in the image of God means we are also relational. A human being is, in part, a “human relating.” It is fair to say that a human cannot be fully human without other humans. We are hard wired and designed in our very essence to be in connection with others. With others we experience the fullness of life.

This is why being alone is among life’s most painful experiences. We are not talking about being alone for a few hours, or even longer as life situations occur, but being ALONE. Not having someone in your life. Not having others with whom you can share life. Did you ever see the movie *Cast Away* with Tom Hanks? Hanks’ character needed companionship so much that he turned a soccer ball into his friend, Wilson.

In our culture, for many years, relationships have been deteriorating. The number of relationships we have is shrinking. The time we spend with close friends is disappearing. And our relationships are increasingly via social media. Relationships are at a distance. For many people, these social-mediated relationships are life savers, but these relationships have not slowed our experience of being friendless, unneeded, unwanted, and unloved. Loneliness is one of the traumas of our time.

One of the most important things we do at Living Word is create spaces for you to CONNECT with others. And then, grow together, love one another, and together serve others. The gift of friendship is one of the greatest gifts you will ever give.

DAY
2

Male and Female He Made Them **Genesis 1:26–27**

This month is devoted to unpacking and expanding what it means to be created in the image of God.

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness” ... God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Though being created in God’s image is certainly striking, it is also frequently misunderstood.

Every man and every woman are FULLY made in the image of God. Both women and men fully share in the qualities God downloaded into humanity. Men do not have part of God’s image and women do not have part of God’s image. Each one has the FULL image of God. For much of human history, women have been considered as less than men. That is NOT biblical theology. Dignity and honor are due to every human being. Mutual respect and deference should exist between men and women, for each has its origins right here—in the beginning!

This next idea may be new to some of you. All the competing religions of the ancient near east had gods (male) and goddesses (female). Men wanted to be like the gods and women wanted to be like the goddesses. The gods and

goddesses were often in conflict and did terrible things to one another. The God of the Bible is ONE GOD, and that one God is above and beyond being male and female. And yet, all the best attributes that may be ascribed to men and all the best attributes that may be ascribed to women are found in the ONE TRUE GOD.

Most often, the Bible uses masculine language to refer to God, but there are many times when feminine language is used as well (Numbers 11:12; Deuteronomy 32:18; Isaiah 40:11, 49:15, 66:13; Matthew 22:37; etc.). All such language is metaphor and analogy because God is above and beyond male and female. God created humanity as male and female to fully represent all that is essential to God. Together we are made in his image, together we reflect and represent his Image, and together we grow into the fullness of his Image.

DAY
3

A Suitable Helper (More Than What You Think!)

Genesis 2:18

*“It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a **helper suitable** for him.”*

Today is a word study day. *Suitable helper* is one of the most misunderstood phrases in the Bible. The translation of 1 Peter 3:7 in the old King James Bible said woman is the weaker vessel. When used in tandem with a misunderstanding of *helper*, it was a short step to see the woman as the weaker sex who is designed to help the man as a servant. Most modern translations of 1 Peter 3:7 make sure the idea in that verse is simply referring to physical strength and nothing else.

What does *helper* mean? The Hebrew word here is *EZER*. When we hear the word *help* or *the help* we think of a servant, someone hired in a subordinate role working for us and under our lead. That is NOT the meaning of *ezer*. *Ezer* refers to someone strong and powerful and is most often used for Yahweh, the helper of his needy people (Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7, 26, 29). Ironically, the *ezer* is the stronger one in the relationship.

The other word is *suitable*. Some translations say “fit for.” The Hebrew word is *ke’negedo*. It is a composite of two words: *ke* and *neged*. *Ke* means corresponding to. Most simply it can be like or as.

Neged means opposite in a complementary (not conflicting) way. Put them together and a literal translation of *ke’negedo* can be: 1) standing in front of, 2) according to what is in front of, 3) corresponding to, and 4) equivalent to. Several scholars say the best translation is *counterpart* or *partner*. One scholar says the word *counter-partner* is an ideal translation.

The phrase *suitable helper* is used ONLY here in the Bible. It is unique and powerful. It means God created a strong (*ezer*) counterpart (*ke’negedo*) or strong partner for the man. On his own man could not fulfill Genesis 1:27. Only the man and woman (his strong partner) together are able to do the work God has created. This is beyond beautiful. Together man and woman are in the image of God. Together they are VERY GOOD.

DAY
4

Together, Side by Side

Genesis 2:7, 18–25

The message of Week 1 talked about Genesis 2:7 and man being formed from the dust of the ground, into which God breathed the breath of life and man became a living being. Genesis 2:18–25 now describes how Eve was created (vv. 21–23) and then the marriage relationship (vv. 24–25).

The side of Adam (rib): Your Bible has a footnote beside the English word *rib*. At the bottom of the page it gives the literal reading: a part of man’s side, for that is what *tsela*, the Hebrew word, means. The same is true for the English word. Look it up in a dictionary. Adam and Eve are *side by side*.

Bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh: Adam realizes that Eve is just like him and from him. All of humanity share in the same essence of being human. Every human is alike in the most important ways, yet humans are also unique and different from all other creatures. Adam and Eve were both created by special creation. From this point on, all others will be born as man and woman come together for procreation.

Woman taken out of man: This alludes to the sense of incompleteness that both men and women feel. Eve is from Adam. Adam is less without Eve. Eve is less without Adam. Both feel this sense of incompleteness. Our incompleteness reminds us that it is not good to be alone.

Man and woman are united and become one flesh: Together they are complete. Together they become one flesh (also referring to procreation). We become one in flesh, heart, mind, soul, body, desires, and dreams. In all the things that matter for life we are to be united.

They were naked and had no shame: This is not simply a reference to sexuality and appearance; it is a reference to original innocence. There is no sin, no tension, no agendas, no manipulation. There is nothing that is wrong between man and woman. They are free, uninhibited, and unencumbered with anything that would cause division. This is how life was meant to be. It is what we no longer have. Genesis 3 is the story of what went wrong.

PERSONAL REFLECTION & LIFEGROUP DISCUSSION

You can always pick any idea from the sermon or the daily readings and biblical passages and talk about those ideas. A good format is to have each LifeGroup member share one idea that was most powerful for them.

Note: One of the problems in studying Genesis 1 (the entire world) and Genesis 2 (humanity in God's world) is these chapters describe a pre-sin condition. We live with the results of sin. That makes it hard to understand the FAR BETTER IDEAL God had created for men and women in the image of God. All our experiences and mindsets are affected by sin and its consequences. As you think about Genesis 2, realize God is describing the ideal we no longer experience.

Day 1: It is not good to be alone. How often do you feel lonely, alone, disconnected? Why is loneliness a growing problem in our culture? What are the emotional experiences that loneliness produces?

Who are your closest friends and how often do you connect with them in substantial ways? What can you do this week to improve your relationships?

Day 2: The Bible most often speaks of character qualities and the moral virtues (see Galatians 5:22–23 and 1 Corinthians 13:4–6). Look at both of those lists. Are there any specific virtues you believe are distinctly male or female? Or are all these character qualities HUMAN characteristics? Can you think of a character quality that is ONLY for men or ONLY for women?

Day 3: Genesis 2 describes men and women together as equals and each as strong counter-partners, together doing God's work. That is the ideal. In what ways have you experienced this ideal? What are the potential benefits of the ideal? Are there any negative possibilities?

Day 4: If you are married, how does being made in the image of God change how you view your partner? How do the two of you complement one another? Where are you weak where your partner is strong? Where are you strong where your partner is weak? Have you ever expressed gratitude to your spouse for the way they complement you?