

**Small Groups Leader Conference**  
(July 16, 2022)

## **1. CREATION // GOD'S ORIGINAL DESIGN**

Before we talk about the goal of a small group, the Gospel, and following Jesus, it is helpful to step back and take a broad view at the Story of God, and look at the realities that were at work at CREATION and GOD'S ORIGINAL DESIGN, specifically in how God interacts with humans.

### **TABLE TALK**

1. What does the opening pages of the Bible (**Chapter 1:1-2:3**) tell us about God?
2. What does the opening pages of the Bible (**Chapter 2:4-2:25**) tell us about humanity, their relationship with God, self, other humans, and creation?

### **GENESIS 1:1-2:3**

**1. What does the opening pages of the Bible (Chapter 1:1-2:3) tell us about God and His relationship to creation in general?**

### **GENESIS 1**

**Day One** (v.3-5): God separates Light & Darkness / Day & Night

**Day Two** (v.6-10): God separates Sky & Water

**Day Three** (v.11-14): God separates Land & Vegetation

**Day Four** (v.14-19): God fills the Day & Night with Sun, Moon, & Stars

**Day Five** (v.20-23): God fills the Sky & Water with Birds & Fish

**Day Six** (v.24-31): God fills the Land with Animals & Humans

### **KEY OBSERVATIONS**

God moves creation from chaos to order.

There is complete Harmony & Rhythm throughout creation

Notice the echoing lines (God Said > It Was > Saw > Declared > It was good)

***SHALOM: Oneness, Completeness, Wholeness, Peace, Harmony, Nothing Missing, Nothing Broken.***

***SHALOM: Things were the way that things were suppose to be.***

Throughout the creation narrative, God is intricate, intimate, and involved. This is central and foundational to who God is. These characteristics set the God of the Bible apart from every other religion (and god(s)/goddess(es)).

God is hospitable. God creates space and then fills the space(s) with purpose. This has powerful implications for us as humans, when we think about God's involvement in our lives.

## GENESIS 2:3-2:25

2. What does the opening pages of the Bible (Chapter 2:4-25) tell us about humanity, their relationship with God, self, other humans, and creation?

### CENTRAL REALITIES TO BEING HUMAN

#### -GENESIS 2:7 - How God forms and interacts with human.

Adam is fully loved by God.

Adam SEES himself as God SEES him.

The human's RELATIONSHIP with GOD & SELF is defined by being BELOVED.

#### -GENESIS 2:18, 20b-25 - How humans interact with one another.

-v.18 - "*helper suitable*" - ezer kenegdo

-v.25 - "*naked, and they felt no shame.*"

There's no games, no pretense, no hiding, no faking. There are *at home* in their own skin (literally).

### 4 RELATIONSHIPS DEFINED by SHALOM

-HUMAN + GOD

-HUMAN + SELF

-HUMAN + OTHER(S)

-HUMAN + CREATION

### SUMMARY

God, who can choose to communicate and reveal Himself any way that He desires and He does so in a very specific way. Throughout the creation narrative, the infinite, immortal, all-powerful creating God is anything but an up-there out-there-somewhere cosmic deity. God is up-close and personal. He is intimate and intricately involved in the creation process. This is revolutionary to understanding Who God is. God kneels down in the dirt and intimately forms the Human. God breaths His very Spirit-Life into Adam. When it comes to the creation of Humans and God's intended relationship and interaction with them, there is shalom. The Human is defined as one fully loved and completely accepted by God. One's identity comes from this loving relationship. Humans are infused with purpose in the world. As it relates to the Human's relationship with God, self, and others there was oneness, completeness, wholeness, peace, and harmony. Nothing was missing. Nothing was broken.

## 2. THE FALL // PARADISE LOST

In Genesis chapter 3, everything changes, *paradise* is *lost*. This account is often referred to as "**The Fall**." It is here where we read about Human's act of disobedience and the consequences of sin. In short, shalom is shattered.

### TABLE TALK

**What were the ramifications of *The Fall*? How did this act of disobedience (sin) affect the 4 Central Relationships of the Human (with God, Self, Others, Creation)? (Genesis 3:1-20 // The New Testament)**

#### -GENESIS 3:1-20

v.7 - "realized they were naked"

v.7 - "sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves"

v.8 - "hid from the LORD (literally: "from the face of the LORD) among the trees (plural) of the garden."

v.1-7 – uses the word "they" // v.10 – uses the word "I" 4x

v.10 - "I heard you (literally: "your-voice I-heard) in the garden - I was afraid - I was naked - I hid

v.12-13 - Blame-shifting (Man > Woman / Woman > Serpent)

v.17b - the ground is "cursed"

### ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

#### **Ephesians 2:1-3**

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup>in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup>All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

#### **Colossians 1:21**

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.

#### **Colossians 2:13-14**

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, <sup>14</sup>having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us...

#### **Romans 5:10a**

For if, while we were God's enemies...

#### **Romans 6:23**

For the wages of sin is death...

## 2 Corinthians 4:3-4

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup>The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

## 4 RELATIONSHIPS DEFINED SHATTERED by a LOSS of SHALOM

- HUMAN X GOD (3:8, 10) – spiritually dead, alienated from God
- HUMAN X SELF (3:7, 10) – ruled by sin, controlled by fear, restless
- HUMAN X OTHER(S) (3:7, 12-14, 15-16) – fear, hiding, pretense
- HUMAN X CREATION (3:14b, 17b-19) – creation is cursed

## SUMMARY

As Humanity disobeyed God, the reality of shalom was shattered in virtually every relationship. The Human's perspective of God is skewed. They are fearful, ashamed, and hiding. Suddenly, as they look at themselves, they that they are *not enough*. Naturally, this infected how Humans would relate to one another. They attempt to cover up their "nakedness" and hide. Humans are prone to pretend to be more than one actually feels like they are, yet at the same time, Humans become quick to shift the blame to others when those shortcomings are pointed out. This disintegration of shalom effects all of creation. Sin is never only an individualized or mere personal matter. Sin is social. Sin is global. Sin becomes systemic.

**SHALOM IS SHATTERED:  
EVERYTHING IS BROKEN > MUCH IS LOST**

### **3. RESTORATION // JESUS & the GOSPEL**

The Story of Scripture is one that vividly portrays the loving, grace-filled Father, as He passionately pursues Humanity. This is ultimately embodied in the Person of Jesus Christ. God the Father, longs to see Humanity restored to all that they were designed to be.

#### **TABLE TALK:**

**What Scriptures speak of God's desire to see Humanity restored?**

**What are we specifically told about Jesus and His role in this restoration project?**

#### **Genesis 3:21-24**

The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. <sup>22</sup>And the Lord God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." <sup>23</sup>So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. <sup>24</sup>After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

#### **Revelation 13:8b**

...the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.

#### **John 1:29**

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

#### **Isaiah 53:2-7**

He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. <sup>3</sup>He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. <sup>4</sup>Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup>But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup>We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. <sup>7</sup>He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

#### **Isaiah 9:6**

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

#### **John 1:1-18**

**John 3:16**

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

**Romans 5:8**

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

**1 Corinthians 15:22**

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

**See also: Romans 5:12-21****1 Corinthians 15:45**

So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.

**2 Corinthians 5:21**

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**Colossians 1:19-22**

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,<sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.<sup>21</sup> Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.<sup>22</sup> But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation...

**Ephesians 2:4-10**

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,<sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.<sup>6</sup> And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,<sup>7</sup> in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.<sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup>not by works, so that no one can boast.<sup>10</sup> For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

**John 14:27**

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

**John 16:33**

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

**Acts 3:21**

Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

**4 RELATIONSHIPS RESTORED****-HUMAN + GOD****Colossians 2:13-14**

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, <sup>14</sup>having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.

**-HUMAN + SELF****Colossians 2:10**

...in Christ you have been made complete.

**Colossians 3:1-4**

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup>Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. <sup>3</sup>For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup>When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

**Romans 12:2-3**

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. <sup>3</sup>Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

**-HUMAN + OTHER(S)****Galatians 3:28**

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

**Colossians 3:11**

Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

**Romans 12:18**

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

**(See also 59 "one another" commands in the New Testament)**

## **-HUMAN + CREATION**

### **Romans 8:19-22**

For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.

<sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

<sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

### **SUMMARY**

Jesus, the Second Adam came to restore all that was lost when the First Adam disobeyed God and sinned. This great sacrifice and restoration accomplished by Christ is the message of the Gospel. As such, salvation includes much more than the forgiveness of sins and the assurance of eternal life with God when one physically dies. Within the context of the broad Story of Scripture, the Gospel is the Good News of what Jesus has secured and made possible for Humans to experience once again: Shalom with God, self, others and creation.



## **4. THE GOAL // SPIRITUAL FORMATION**

### **TABLE TALK:**

**What is God's goal for every Christian?** (Find supporting verses)

#### **Romans 8:29**

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

#### **Galatians 4:19**

My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you...

#### **3 John 2**

Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.

#### **1 Thessalonians 5:23**

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **SUMMARY**

God's goal is that every believer become transformed into the image of Christ. Christianity is more than a set of doctrines to adhere to, it is a way of life. We are changed from the inside out, we become who He has already created us to be. This ongoing process and journey is called spiritual formation. As we experience Christ being formed within us, we also begin to demonstrate Christ's character outwardly in our daily lives, everywhere we go, and to those we are around.

## 5. THE PROCESS

Our ongoing transformation into Christlikeness is just that, on-going. It is not instantaneous or automatic. It requires diligence and intentionality over time. Spiritual formation is a journey. God is always at work in some area(s) of our lives convicting, challenging, and prompting us toward our next step. Spiritual maturity is growing in our awareness of this divine activity in and around us.

### TABLE TALK:

**Where has God been at work within you, convicting, challenging, prompting you toward change and transformation?**

**(What has God been teaching you, and what have you been learning about God, yourself, and others?)**

### Philippians 1:6

being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

### Philippians 2:12-13

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

### Romans 12:1-3

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. <sup>2</sup>Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. <sup>3</sup>Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

### Colossians 3:1-19

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup>Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. <sup>3</sup>For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup>When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. <sup>5</sup>Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. <sup>6</sup>Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. <sup>7</sup>You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. <sup>8</sup>But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. <sup>9</sup>Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices <sup>10</sup>and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. <sup>11</sup>Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. <sup>12</sup>Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup>Bear with each other and

forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. <sup>14</sup>And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. <sup>15</sup>Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup>Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. <sup>17</sup>And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

### **Ephesians 4:15-32**

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup>From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. <sup>17</sup>So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. <sup>18</sup>They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. <sup>19</sup>Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. <sup>20</sup>That, however, is not the way of life you learned <sup>21</sup>when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. <sup>22</sup>You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; <sup>23</sup>to be made new in the attitude of your minds; <sup>24</sup>and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. <sup>25</sup>Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. <sup>26</sup>“In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, <sup>27</sup>and do not give the devil a foothold. <sup>28</sup>Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. <sup>29</sup>Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. <sup>30</sup>And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup>Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. <sup>32</sup>Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

### **James 1:21**

Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

### **Galatians 5:22-25**

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup>Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup>Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

## THE ROLE OF OTHERS IN THE PROCESS

Following Jesus is personal, but never intended to be privatized and individualistic. The Bible refers to us as *the Body of Christ*, as *many members*, as a *community*. In fact, at least 59-times the New Testament uses the phrase “*one another*.” Small group leaders play a critical role in *coming alongside others in the journey*, joining people where they are at, and walking with them to the next step.

### 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8

Instead, we were like young children among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, <sup>8</sup>so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

### 1 Thessalonians 3:10

Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

### Romans 1:11-12

I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—<sup>12</sup>that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith.

### Philippians 1:25-26

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, <sup>26</sup>so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

## SUMMARY

Total transformation is a life-long process. God sees all of who we are, even the hidden parts. God is on a mission to bring every part of us to the cross. By grace we were *saved*, and it is by that same grace that we are *being-saved*. God lovingly and kindly, yet persistently, as C. S. Lewis writes in *The Last Battle*, invites us “*further up and further in*” to the heart of God and the likeness of Jesus.

## 6. NEXT STEPS

***“Spiritual formation takes place by the direct work of the Holy Spirit, regenerating and conforming us to the image of Jesus Christ as the Spirit indwells, fills, guides, gifts, and empowers people for life in the community of faith and in the world.”***

*(The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation)*