

Being Human (Part Two)

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[0 : 0 0] Today's Old Testament reading comes from the book of Genesis, chapter 1, verses 26 through 31. Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. And God blessed them.

And God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

And God said, Behold, I have given you every plant-yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit, you shall have them for food.

And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the heavens, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.

[1 : 1 7] And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Well, again, let me welcome those of you, especially those I have not yet met.

If you're joining us for the first time tonight, we are in the midst of a series that we started a few weeks back called Foundations. And we're taking some time to ask what you might call ultimate or foundational questions about ourselves, about our world, about our God.

And the foundation for all of this can be found in the first few chapters of the book of Genesis, which is the first book of your Bible. It's the first book of the Old Testament.

And so we're looking at the first few chapters. We've spent quite a few weeks in chapter 1. And we're here at the end of chapter 1. A couple of weeks ago, we asked the question as a part of our series, what does it mean to be human?

[2 : 2 8] What does it mean to be a human being? What does it mean to be a person? It's a pretty foundational question. And there are a lot of thoughts about that, but very little agreement. Which is interesting, considering most everything else that we think, believe, do, is somehow related to how we answer that question.

There are some people that say, well, being human is distinct in that we can use tools, or we have a superior intelligence, or we have the ability of foresight, or we have the ability to have self-awareness, or it's our use of imagination and creativity.

And yet there's a whole other group of researchers that continues to say and to demonstrate that they're finding that animals are capable of such feats and such acts.

And so there are some people who say, well, genetically we're 99% identical to chimpanzees. There is nothing that makes human beings uniquely human.

So we're asking, what does it mean to be human? Is there anything that is distinct about a human being? And we're looking in the Bible to help us understand this, specifically at Genesis chapter 1, verses 26 to 31.

[3 : 40] And a couple of weeks ago we had part 1 of this, and we said, first of all, what makes us human, what it means to be human, is that we are created in the image of God, the one who made us.

Unlike the other creatures of creation, we uniquely bear God's image. And we said that has a lot of implications. It means that we are spiritual and material, that we are body souls.

It means that we have an inherent holiness or sanctity, that there is a sanctity to all human life. And we said, lastly, that there is an inherent dignity to all human life.

Well, this week we're going to continue asking this question, looking at this passage, and we're going to go further than just our nature as image bearers, and we're going to look at the purposes for which human beings were made.

Why are we here? And we're going to see that this passage shows us that the central reason that we're here is that we're made for relationship. Simply put, we're made for relationship.

[4 : 47] Three kinds of relationship, to be more specific. We're made to have a certain kind of relationship with this world. We're made to have relationships with one another.

And we're made to have a relationship, finally, and most importantly, with God. And we're going to have time tonight to look at the first two in detail. We will touch on the third. And then next week we're actually going to spend the whole night talking about what our relationship with God was created to be as we look at the Sabbath.

But tonight we're primarily going to focus on the first two, our relationship with creation and our relationship with one another. And here's really the point of tonight that I would like to invite you to consider.

And that is that whether or not you're a Christian, whether or not you're certain what you believe or whether you believe there's anything to this, this is making a very clear claim.

And that is that all three kinds of relationship are essential to what it means to be a human being. And if you have all three, a right relationship with the world, a right relationship with other people, and a right relationship with God, that that is the most fully human way to be.

[6 : 03] And if you lack any one of these, it's impossible to be fully and authentically human. So that's the claim. So let's consider these in more detail. Let's pray for the Lord to lead us. Our Father, we do thank you for your word.

We thank you for your promise to speak through it. May this not remain simply ink and paper, but through the power of your spirit, may we see in these pages and hear in these words and encounter the word, your son.

We pray that by encountering him, we would be changed, that we would leave differently than when we arrived. And we pray that this would be for your glory in the name of your son.

Amen. So, again, we're looking at Genesis chapter 1, beginning in verse 26. The first thing we see is that we're created for a certain kind of relationship with this world.

It says in verse 26, Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

[7 : 21] And then if we move down to verse 28, it says, And God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it. And then again, Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, every living thing that moves on the earth.

So right here, we have our original job description, the original job description for human beings in creation. And you have these verbs that really stand out.

Be fruitful, multiply, fill, subdue, have dominion. Now the context of these words in the English language, they have certain connotations to them, undeniably so.

When you look at the words by themselves, at least for me, they conjure up ideas of conquest, domination. When I hear have dominion, my mind immediately goes to this idea of domination.

And so this, at first pass, gives us this image of human beings sort of spreading throughout creation and subduing and conquering and dominating.

[8 : 30] And it sounds more like a virus. And surely, this helps us understand why many people have taken these verses to justify all kinds of harmful and exploitative relationship with the world.

In the years and decades following the Enlightenment, when there arose in the Western culture a kind of post-Enlightenment utilitarianism, there was very much a view that we could justify exploiting the earth for our personal gain in the name of progress.

And it was easy for Christians to jump on the bandwagon and to support that theologically by pointing to such verses. But is that, in fact, accurate? And we see as we move to chapter 2 that, in fact, that's not the right way to read this because God restates this job description to Adam in verse 15 of chapter 2.

It says, The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work and to keep it. Or you might translate it to tend and till it. That's Andy Crouch's way of translating this in his book, Culture Making, which, if you haven't read it, you should pick it up and read it.

It's a fantastic book that focuses on this idea. There's a lot here. We're going to come back to this, actually, in a few weeks when we talk about our work and our vocation.

[9 : 55] Our whole way of understanding as Christians, our work and our vocation is rooted in these verses. But for now, it helps just to clarify our role in the natural world.

because God's given us this tremendous responsibility. He's created this world that he says is good and perfect. It reflects his will in every way, and yet it's inherently incomplete.

It's an unfinished world. And that's amazing. That should give us applause. Why? Why would it be good and yet incomplete?

Why would God create a world full of potential? An acorn world? Well, that's why we're here. It's amazing to think that God desires us to bear his image in creation by finishing creation.

In other words, by... Why did God create a garden and then the rest of the earth is a wilderness? It's because the purpose of human beings is to turn the wilderness into a garden.

[10 : 58] It's to finish the work of creation. It is to exercise dominion. It is to subdue. It is to cause to flourish and be fruitful.

This was our original purpose here. It's our job to turn the wilderness into a garden. And our role can really be summarized in one word. It's the best word for it, and that is the role of stewardship.

Stewardship. Part of what it means to be human is that we are stewards of creation. What that means is this. All of this stuff, just as we sang a little while ago, this is our Father's world.

It doesn't belong to us. Nothing does. It all belongs to Him. And we have a responsibility to care for it. We've all been in this situation where we had a friend go out of town, or maybe we were the people going out of town, and they wanted somebody.

Maybe they wanted you to come and house sit. And they say, well, come, and we're going to be gone for a few weeks, and we want you to house sit. And all the food in the fridge is yours. All the wine in the wine rack is yours.

[12 : 04] You can have it. We want you to enjoy yourself. Watch Netflix. Sleep in the bed. We want this to be a restful time for you. At least, hopefully, that's what they said when you house sat. And they said, make yourself at home.

But that doesn't mean this is your home. In other words, it doesn't mean that it belongs to you. Right? And a good house sitter knows that you need to take care of that house.

You need to take care of the stuff. You need to enjoy it and love it and have fun with it, but you need to remember that it doesn't belong to you, right? And in the same way, God has said, this is my world, but I'm entrusting it to you.

And in verses 29 to 31, we actually see why this balance, this stewardship relationship, it requires such a finely tuned understanding, it's because God establishes an interdependence between us and the earth, an interdependent relationship.

So it says, yes, we have dominion over the earth. Yes, we're called to subdue it. Yes, we're called to exercise in God's name authority over it and make it flourish, but we also have to depend on it for our survival.

[13 : 13] So it needs us to cultivate and care for it. The world was designed to need humans to care for it, and yet, we need it for our survival.

We need each other, so there's a very fine balance here. And it's fascinating when you think about the way this speaks into the current conversations about human beings and the environment, because it does balance us out.

On the one hand, we very clearly see that we're not called to worship nature. We're not called to worship animals or trees or mountains or rivers.

We're not called to worship these things because the Bible makes it very clear that God is not His creation. He's above it. He's separate from it. That's what holiness is. So we're not called to do that.

It says, we're not called to think of animals as being as valuable or more valuable than human beings. because we see here that only human beings are created in the image of God.

[14 : 16] Animals are created after their own kind. And we're called to have dominion over them and they're given into our hands. God gives the world into the hands of human beings for their survival.

However, we are the ones God holds responsible to care for the world and to make it as fruitful as it can possibly be. So that means that we are accountable and as Christians when we have an understanding of sin and repentance, we need to include in these things, in our understanding of what sin is, things like pollution and global warming and the depletion of natural resources and waste disposal and deforestation and animal cruelty and overpopulation.

these are things that should massively concern us. They're things for which we are responsible and are held accountable. You know, the issue of overpopulation is an interesting one.

It says that God blesses people and gives them the potential to fill the earth. That doesn't mean we have license to so populate the earth that it becomes unsustainable for human life, right?

This is something we need to be thinking about as Christians. These are actually ways that we sin against God, His world, and our created purpose, things that we need to repent of.

[15 : 42] And the church has not historically done a very good job of recognizing the central role we should be playing in these issues. Some of you, many of you actually here are very passionate about these issues.

You either volunteer or through your vocation you work on issues like renewable energy or environmental stewardship and I know that you're passionate about these things.

This is changing. Pope Francis' encyclical on climate change, *Laudato Si*, is a strong voice in the direction of recognizing our role.

He very much emphasizes in that the interconnectedness, the interdependence between us and all living things. There are groups like Arosha and Flourish and the Evangelical Environmental Network.

Many of you are affiliated with these groups already. Some friends of ours have actually joined together and started a campaign with the Humane Society called Every Living Thing and they're trying to get Christians engaged in standing up for and fighting against animal cruelty.

[16 : 50] And actually, our very own Ryan Patch was commissioned to make the video that sort of explains this campaign and to my great surprise when I watched the video, I saw Aaron and Joanna and their dog Lily in the video, which was pretty cool.

But this, so a lot of our friends are involved in this. All of the groups that are partnering with it, we're personal friends with and we think it's a great movement. It's called Every Living Thing. You should check it out. But all of this is basically where Christians are catching up to or recovering or regaining a sense of the fact that this needs to be a central concern for us as we think about a missional presence in this world, restoring the created purpose of human beings to be good stewards of creation, to recognize our responsibility to care for this world.

And what this means, if we're talking about what it means to be human, it means when we neglect this, it's not just irresponsible, it's inhuman. There's an inhumanity to us when we neglect these things.

So that's the first kind of relationship we're called to have, a balanced relationship of interdependence, a stewardship relationship with the world that God has made, with our Father's world, as we sang earlier.

The next kind of relationship we'll look at is the kind of relationships that we are called to have with one another, interpersonal human connection. If we look at Genesis 1.26, it's very fascinating.

[18 : 27] It says, Then God said, Let us make man in our image after our likeness. What's fascinating about this is if you look at the whole creation account, start at Genesis 1, verse 1, and you read through it, there's a poetic rhythm to it, because this is a kind of liturgical poetry, as we said a few weeks ago.

And there's a rhythm to it, and the rhythm repeatedly says this, Then God said, and God said, and God said, and God said, and it says that for all of the days of creation, for the sky and the sea and the day and the night and the earth and the land, all of that, until we get to the day that God creates human beings.

And then it changes. And imagine, you know, in a song, if you've been hitting the same note, and all of a sudden you hit a different note. You're meaning, you're trying to emphasize something. And it changes, and it doesn't say, and God said, it says, then God said, let us.

And that us just kind of crackles into existence. Us. And it emphasizes the nature of God as a relationship. This being who is one, and yet three persons, three distinct persons, who are all God, and yet they're not interchangeable.

And so what we have here is a being who is one and yet interpersonal. An eternal relationship. And then we see later when God places Adam in the garden, in chapter 2, it says in 2, verse 18, that it's not good for Adam to be alone.

[20 : 07] And the sense of that is that he is incomplete. And while this has implications for gender and implications for marriage, and we'll be talking about those in a few weeks, this also has implications for the fact that humans are designed for relationship with others.

That it's part of how we're built. It's part of how we're made because we reflect the image of a God who is a relationship.

And the most foundational, most basic relationship, as much as we talk about marriage these days, the most foundational relationship is actually friendship. And you know, friendship, at its core, every good marriage is a committed friendship.

A lifelong, covenantal friendship. friendship. This is why Aristotle, I believe, wrote so much about what he called the virtuous friendship. He said, you know, there are friendships of pleasure and friendships of utility, but he considered among the highest possible things that human beings could attain a virtuous friendship.

And that's a friendship where you are concerned for the betterment of the other, regardless of whether that brings you pleasure or utility, that your primary concern is for the good of the other.

[21 : 32] And he said, this virtuous friendship, there are few, if anything, greater than that that human beings can attain. He put it higher even than things like justice. Neuroscience, as we look, and it's always dubious to quote neuroscience, so, you know, so, so, a caveat aside, you know, but, but, you know, neuroscience is increasingly showing actually across the board that, that our brains are hardwired for social connection.

They're just hardwired for social connection. I mean, studies everywhere in every kind of area you can imagine are just showing again and again and again that we are, the wiring, the way we're built is actually designed for that.

There was a study that you may have heard of at Harvard called the Grant Study. Anybody heard of this? It's famous because it's the longest and most comprehensive longitudinal study really ever undertaken.

Now, admittedly, there was a narrow selection of candidates. 268, I think, all of them white, Harvard males were a part of, this started in the early 20th century, so, you know, cut it a little slack, but, but essentially the idea was take people who are pretty well off, who seem to come from decent families, who are fairly intelligent, who had a fairly decent shot at worldly success, and tracked them for 75 years.

This has been running for 75 years, and the goal is to figure out what are the primary factors that, that influence aging well, living a long time, and being satisfied with life.

[23 : 14] What are the main factors that contribute to that, to those outcomes? And they assessed everything. They assessed everything about career, everything about family, everything about health, to everything from organ functioning, to the hanging length of the scrotum.

Yeah, let that sink in. Suffice it to say, they wanted to leave no stone unturned in their search for the key to well-being.

The outcome, it may surprise you to know, has nothing to do with scrotal hanging length. The outcome is, in fact, the primary investigator for the last three decades is a guy named Dr. George Valant.

He's written three books on the findings, and he says this, essentially, life satisfaction and healthy aging can all be boiled down to one factor. Guess what it is? The quality and the warmth of human relationships.

Literally, the people with the warmest, deepest, highest quality friendships are the people who not only live the longest, but the people who report the most satisfaction in their lives.

[24 : 31] It matters more than money, it matters more than career, it matters more than where you live, it matters more even than your health. Human relationships. We were designed for it, we were made for relationships.

They make us more human. They make us more human. I've said this before, but you know, C.S. Lewis in *The Four Loves* has a great example of how we are humanized in our relationships.

He says when a friend, when a mutual friend died, there used to be three friends that would spend a lot of time together, and he said when this one of the friends died, the two remaining friends, he said logically you would think that would mean you would get more of each other because there's not a third person competing.

But he said in fact it was the opposite because the friend that died used to be able to evoke things in this person that only he could evoke.

And he would evoke things in this person that only he could evoke. And so the loss of that person meant a loss in each of the surviving friends. Something in them was no longer brought out.

[25 : 36] The more we have deep, meaningful human relationships, the more of us is brought out or evoked or nourished into being or watered or fed that we humanize one another.

Relationships are the key factor to our health and well-being because we're designed for them. So knowing that, here's the question. We should be very thoughtful when it comes to things that hurt or impair or damage our relationships.

Right? If I told you, if I took one of your organs and put it out and your life depends on this organ and I put it in a glass jar and said, take care of this, you probably would.

You would, you know, if your heart was somehow on the outside of your body and it was in a glass case, you would probably protect it and you wouldn't let anybody... Why don't we do that with our relationships? Why are our relationships, if they're so key to our health and well-being, why will we so casually let them go?

Why will we so casually let them fade? As somebody who has let many, many, many friendships fade, I often ask myself this question. One in...

[26 : 55] What a big issue that I think we should talk about in relation to relationships is the impact that technology is having. This is a big conversation as it should be.

In 2010, researchers put together the findings of 72 separate studies and they found that there had been a decline in empathy among college students.

A 40% decline. And there was a precipitous drop starting in the year 2000. And since the year 2000, empathy among college students has been plummeting.

A 40% drop is quite significant. And the primary reason that researchers point to is the impact of technology on our empathy. If you may be familiar with Sherry Turkle who writes and thinks a lot about this, she's an MIT professor who basically has spent decades researching this.

And here's what she says specifically about our smartphones. She says, Our phones are not accessories, but psychologically potent devices that change not just what we do, but who we are.

[28 : 08] Your phone in your pocket is changing who you are. It's changing not only your productivity, your connectedness to things like email and social media, but it's changing you.

She did a study in a device-free summer camp and she had a control group and an experimental group. In the control group, they were allowed to continue using their devices and they participated in all of the camp events.

And the experimental group, she took their devices away. And she said, after just a few days, there was a statistically significant measurable increase in empathy among kids who had had their devices taken away.

Why is that? Well, she says it's quite simple. We learn, especially as children, we learn empathy from face-to-face contact. When I'm looking at you and I'm talking to you and I say something funny and I see your face smile and I see you laugh, I learn, I learn what that emotion looks like on your face.

Or if I say something that's hurtful or a hurtful topic comes up or you get angry, I see what that looks like. And because we're talking face-to-face, body-to-body, person-to-person, as kids, we learn how to read the emotions of others and then we develop the capacity to identify and put our place, put ourselves in one another's place.

[29 : 28] But today, the tendency is more and more for kids, even who are there together, to text one another. So they're literally getting less time looking at one another's eyes and so they're not learning how to empathize.

But just a few days without devices, and there was a spike in empathy because kids were learning how to interpersonally connect. Simply having a phone put out on the table, so having a phone just out on the table, doesn't have to be on, it can be in the periphery, it can be on the edge of the table.

Simply having a phone in the vicinity when you're speaking to another person has a measurable impact both on the quality of the conversation and the things that you choose to talk about.

Conversation tends to be a lot more disconnected, topics tend to be a lot lighter, the sense of connection tends to be a lot less. Why? Because there's that ever-present awareness of this other thing that might interrupt you.

This is the kind of impact that simply smartphones alone, not to mention the impact on marriages, on sex lives, on intimacy. So the question we need to be thinking is what role is technology playing in our life?

[30 : 46] Technology is not evil, it's not good, it's neutral, but as Turkle says, it is very obviously taking us places we may not want to go. Especially if what we've said about relationships is true.

And here's the thing, if part of what it means to be human is having warm and deep friendships, and our smartphones are harming those relationships, then we need to ask ourselves a very honest question.

Are our smartphones dehumanizing us? That's a strong way to put it, but is this dehumanizing me?

I believe they are. I believe they are. I think that all of the connectivity is having ultimately a dehumanizing effect.

Now what does that mean? It means different things for different people. It may mean that we throw our smartphones out and we go back to the flip phone. Maybe that'll solve it. Some of you are very pro flip phone.

[31 : 51] You're that far ahead of the rest of us in the curve. But, and that may be for some of us the answer. That may be what I have to do. Surely, at a minimum, it means that we're very intentional about how and when we use devices.

That we have device-free zones and times in our house. I remember, and I've probably told you before the time that one of my boys was trying to get my attention and I was looking at my phone as I will habitually do, like a nervous tick.

I can whip that thing out and get to my news feed in a fraction of a second. Right? With the slightest pause in activity. Boom! I'm on the news feed. My kids hate it. You know how I know? Because he took it out of my hand and dropped it in a cup of water.

And then he said, Dada? Because that's all he could say. He was that young but he had learned to hate the smartphone in my hand. So what role is technology playing in our lives and our relationships?

We need to be thinking about what it means to have freedom from these things that are meant to set us free. As a church community, I think we need to take very seriously the priority of human relationships.

[33 : 05] We believe this is what makes us human. That face-to-face conversation and interaction is one of the most humanizing things we can do. When you invite people into your home to have dinner with you, there's much more going on there than you might think.

That is an opportunity to humanize and be humanized. It's nothing less than that. Hospitality and our commitment to radical hospitality is one of the most powerful ministries that we can have.

Why? Because you're inviting somebody into a relationship where they can experience humanness. There are a few greater things that we can do for another human being.

Our vision is for this community to not only be a place where anyone can experience that, but where we actually take steps to safeguard and protect our relationships.

And also, by the way, what that means is if somebody is working 80 hours a week and they have no margin, that we say, I have an interest in you being a human being.

[34 : 11] You need to cut back. You need to have margins. We're so quick to judge somebody else's diet. That's bad for you.

You're going to die next year if you keep eating like that. Maybe that's just what people say to me, but people have said that to me a lot.

But what I don't often hear is people saying, you need to prioritize the relationships and the friendships in your life. If you don't, you're going to live a short life.

It's actually hurting you and dehumanizing you. The fact that you work that much. We need to be having these conversations. This is also a place to learn how to have friendships.

A gospel-centered church can be a laboratory for learning how to be a friend and how to have friends. Listen, friendship is a set of skills, a set of abilities and aptitudes that does not come naturally to people.

[35 : 11] We need to learn how. And there are people here who feel like they continually fall through the social cracks. This needs to be a place where those people learn how to be friends and have friends.

We need to have these conversations about what real friendship means. It requires making, in some cases, major changes. But if human relationships are so central to our humanness, why would we not do everything we can to protect and nourish them?

So, as I said at the beginning, the third kind of relationship we're created for, we looked at our relationship with the world as stewards and we looked at our relationship with one another and how vital that is to our lives.

The third kind of relationship is the kind of relationship that we are designed to have with God. And we're going to spend, in some ways, this is what we talk about every week.

We're going to get into it in much more detail next week, but I will say, I will say one thing. I'll say this one thing about this third relationship. There's a reason why virtually every society across all cultures and societies, all places, virtually every society that has ever existed has been religious.

[36 : 24] There's a reason for that. There's a reason why when places like China try to outlaw religion, the opposite effect happens and there's an explosion of spiritual hunger.

children. It's because we were made to know the one who made us. And that is the good, fundamentally good impulse underneath all religions is that desire.

You know, a few nights ago, we had the senior leadership team from this church, All Souls Unitarian. They came over to my house. Some of our leadership was there. We had a wonderful conversation.

And it's very clear that we disagree on most issues. But one of the things as the Spirit worked and as time passed and as guards dropped and as tears began to flow and as arms uncrossed and legs uncrossed and postures became more open and eye contact became deeper and more prolonged, one of the things we were able to acknowledge together is that we all have a deep down gnawing hunger to know that we are loved by God.

That we're loved by God. And it's because we were made to know the one who made us. And all of these relationships that we're talking about are part of what it means to be a human being.

[37 : 48] Our relationship with creation. Our relationship with one another. Our relationship, most importantly, with God. All tend toward one or another of these. You know, some of us are very much about the environment.

And some of us are very much about community and we love community. And some of us are very pious and religiously observant people. Right? We all have our tendencies. But the point this is making is all three are required for humanness.

You can't have one without the other. In other words, the ecological landfills that some of us are so concerned about, those are simply symptoms of the spiritual landfill.

And you cannot address one without addressing the other. All of these are required. You cannot have a relationship with the Lord that doesn't immediately impact your relationships with other people.

Because Jesus says if we love Him, we'll love one another. We need all three. And that's why the gospel is such good news. The good news is this, that Jesus Christ has come to restore all of these relationships.

[38 : 55] Through His death and resurrection, He reconciles us to God. As He puts His Spirit in us and as we follow Him, we learn more what it means to love one another as we're loved.

And then lastly, His promise is to renew the heavens and the earth. Including our bodies. This is why the gospel is not only good news, but there's no better news imaginable for human beings than Jesus.

Because Jesus has come for nothing less than to make us fully human once again. That's the gospel. That's what it's here to do.

The gospel restores to us our humanity. Let's pray. Our Father, we recognize that for Your words to penetrate, to be planted and to give life, it requires Your Spirit.

We pray that whatever has been said that is not of You would be removed from our memory, but whatever has been said tonight that is Your Word, Lord, and we believe this is Your Word, that You, by Your Spirit, would plant it deep in our hearts, that it would bring new life in and through us.

[40 : 08] We pray this in Your Son's holy name. Amen.