

# What Flourishing Looks Like

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 05 October 2025

Preacher: Johan DeJong

[ 0 : 00 ] Thank you both. It will really help if you have your Bible open because we are going to be looking back and forth at these various different verses as we go. So here is the first family. That's what we find in Genesis. But it's also, and maybe this is less obvious to us when we read the Bible, it's also the first gathering of God's people. Adam and Eve are the first church.

And what we see here in Genesis is that men and women are equal, different, and united. And we begin to get a sense of how those differences are expressed in different roles.

So first of all, they're equal. Chapter 1, verse 27. So God created mankind in his own image. In the image of God, he created them. Male and female, he created them.

So God made men and women as his image bearers. Not men alone, not women alone. And that is where we derive our inalienable value from, our equal value from, that he made both sexes to reflect him.

So value doesn't come, we immediately see, from our place in any hierarchy. It comes from the fact that we were made by God to reflect his image, both men and women.

[ 1 : 17 ] That's permanent, isn't it? Any value we get from a hierarchy is temporary. At best, it lasts until you die. And then you're out. We're equal. Chapter 1, verse 26.

Then God said, So that's plural reference to men and women, in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals.

So we see that men and women are given basically the same status in this world, the same place. Both are to rule under God, over everything else.

The same basic status. And then chapter 2, verse 22. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

We're made, in other words, from the same stuff. We are equal. We're equal, but we're different.

[ 2 : 21 ] And we begin to see that even in these very first parts of the Bible. Chapter 2, verse 7.

Then 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.

He was made first. And then Eve was made. And then if you go to chapter 2, verse 15, where Hugh picked up reading from, we see that Adam's job is to work the garden.

And that later becomes the ground outside the Garden of Eden. Adam is given those commands.

The two commands by God, isn't he?

Do you notice what the first command is? The first command that God gives Adam is, be free. You are free to eat from any tree in the garden. Isn't that great?

And, of course, he's also given that one restriction. Don't eat from that tree. It's bad for you. But those commands are given to Adam.

[ 3 : 21 ] Adam names the animals. Read that. Chapter 2, verse 20. And eventually, if you were to read on into chapter 3, verse 20, he names Eve as well. That's part of his role.

When Adam and Eve later disobey God, who is it that God speaks to about their sin, first of all? It's Adam.

The snake approaches Eve. God speaks to Adam, even though he wasn't the first to sin. What does that mean? Well, it really means what we've been saying, really, when we were talking about what it means to be good men as well.

Adam carries representative responsibility for both. Kind of like the chairman of a board of trustees represents the organisation, even though he's just one of the trustees.

He carries representative responsibility. He's to work to provide for Eve, and he's supposed to protect that garden from lies. The lies that Satan would tell.

[ 4 : 23 ] And he fails, doesn't he? Adam is different from Eve in that way. But then we also immediately learn, chapter 2, verse 18.

The Lord God said, the only thing that is not good in all of my creation is, it is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.

He can't do the job on his own, in other words. He needs help. And so help is given in the form of Eve. Now, I think sometimes when we hear the word help, we think inferior.

But in the Bible, being a helper does not imply any inferiority. It doesn't mean, kind of, my assistant, you know, the junior one, the dog's body.

That's not what it means. The word helper is the word used to describe the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit who is co-equal with the Father and the Son, who is exactly as divine as the Father and the Son are.

[ 5 : 25 ] That's what helping looks like. And she can help. Why? Precisely because she doesn't have the same strengths and weaknesses as Adam.

Right? She is a helper that is suitable. She's suitable. Not identical. Suitable. She brings skills, perspective that he doesn't have.

Their differences correspond. And so men and women complement each other. And that makes Eve a partner. Not a duplicate. A partner.

His role is to protect and provide for life. Hers is to bring it forth. That's what we see later on, isn't it? You might be thinking, well, yeah, that sounds like old-fashioned nonsense to me.

Social science actually bears out that there are broad differences between men and women the way that we have been describing. With overlap as well. So I'm not stereotyping.

[ 6 : 23 ] But there absolutely are differences between men and women. Here's some of them. See if you can digest that little list. Maybe take a photo. You'll get the sources as well.

But I want to emphasize again. These are broad differences. So we don't say, off the back of the Bible and social science, every woman should be like this.

The Bible doesn't support that. Social science doesn't support that. What we can say is, generally speaking, most men possess most of these kinds of qualities.

That's the way that we're talking. So men and women are equal, but different. And maybe most importantly, they're united.

Let's look at chapter 1, verse 24. Verse 24. 26.

[ 7 : 25 ] Sorry. Then God said, let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness. Verse 27. God created mankind in his own image.

In the image of God he created them. Male and female he created them. So both Adam and Eve are made in God's image. That means they're equal, but it also means, actually, that only together can they truly represent what God is like.

How does that work? It's when we love and serve together in unity and community that we truly reflect God. Why? Because God himself is three in one. He himself lives in unity and community, and therefore it requires men and women together to reflect his image properly.

We've just seen, haven't we, chapter 2, verse 18, that the only not good thing about creation is for the man to be left to his own devices. How does that translate? Chapter 1, verse 28.

God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish in the sea, and all the rest of it. They were given that job together, weren't they?

[ 8 : 37 ] They didn't just have the same status. They had the same task. They have the job of bringing order to the world and filling it. And the ultimate expression of that, as we read in chapter 2, verse 24, is, of course, marriage.

That is why man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they became one flesh. The ultimate expression of that unitedness of man and woman is marriage, because it makes one out of two.

It's where the fitting together of men and women results in physical flourishing and fruitfulness, doesn't it? It's a bit like the different parts of a flower.

Different parts, leaves, stem, petals, the centre, different shapes, different functions, same sorts of cells, same DNA, all needed.

And it's when all of those parts work together, then there is beauty, then there is fruitfulness, isn't there? So here's just a moment to reflect.

[ 9 : 47 ] Of these three truths, the fact that God created men and women to be equal, different, and united, which has had the least impact on how you treat men and women?

That's what I'd love you to just reflect on, on those three aspects. Which has had the least impact on your attitude towards men and women? And what do you think the Lord might want you to do about that? I'm just going to sit down, take a moment to think about that.

I can tell you that for me it's the last one.

This is the one I need to be thinking and praying about more. God planned equality and difference and unity from the start. And that is what results in flourishing in the garden.

That's what's called paradise. That's Eden. That's what we've been trying to get back to ever since the fall, isn't it? How does that play out in the church? Because that's what we said we were talking about today.

[ 11 : 25 ] Well, in order to figure that out, we're going to have our reading from the New Testament. So, Emi, thank you. Shall I do both?

Yeah. Yeah. Okay, the first reading is from 1 Corinthians 12, various verses. And you can find it on page 1153 of the Bibles.

We're going to start at verse 4. it would not for that reason stop being part of the body.

And if the ear should say, because I'm not an eye, I do not belong to the body, it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be?

If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact, God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

[ 12 : 58 ] Verse 23. And the parts that we think are less honourable, we treat with special honour, and the parts that are unrepresentable are treated with special modesty.

Verse 24b. But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. And now we're going to look at Titus chapter 1, verse 5 to 9, and that's page 1198 of the Bibles.

An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe, and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless, not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.

[ 14 : 21 ] Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

And the final reading is from 1 Timothy 2, verse 12 to 13. And I'm afraid I didn't get a page number for this, so if someone could find it and shout it out, that would be great. Anyone got a...

1,191. Thank you. 1,191. Starting from verse 12. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man.

She must be quiet, for Adam was formed first, then Eve. Thank you, Immy.

Can you see how what we learnt in Genesis is beginning to be reflected and worked out here? First thing we see in that passage of 1 Corinthians is that we're not all the same.

[ 15 : 35 ] Paul describes his church, Christ's church, as Christ's body, made up of many parts, ears, eyes, nose, feet, even the unmentionables.

We don't look like each other. We have different functions, like Adam and Eve. We are to complement each other. Chapter 12, verse 4. I don't think we read it, but we did.

Here we are. There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone, it is the same God at work.

So Paul sees what we all see, which is that people are different. People have different kinds of talents, whether it be natural ones, actually, or supernatural ones, and that that is good. And he says, secondly, you cannot say you don't need each other just because you prefer one kind over another.

We can't say everybody is most helpful when there are no's. Okay? We need the ears and the eyes and the feet and the head as well. We can't say what we really would like is for all Christians to be

preachers.

[16:44] That's not how God's church works. In fact, did you pick up on this? It's precisely the bits that we would give less honour to that God would give more honour to.

The bits that we think less able, less useful, less gifted, whoever that might be. I risk some guesses. Older folks, children, those with disabilities, historically women, those human beings would think of as less useful, less valuable, less honourable.

Those are the parts that are given greater honour. So that is a warning to us, isn't it? However God has set up his church, it is certainly not the intention for us to consider any kind of Christian a burden.

It's certainly not his intention for us to put any one kind of person at the front and say, that's what giftedness looks like. We should all be more like that. We need each other.

We are all needed. Now why has God done it this way? Verse 25, 26. So that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

[18:05] If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. God has made it that way so that there should be no division, so that we serve together.

We're all to serve, all to suffer, all to rejoice, all to be honoured together because we're one local body. Equal, different, united.

See? And the foundation of this, as we read right at the beginning of this New Testament reading, is that it's the same spirit, the same Lord, the same God who is at work in all of us.

It's not having the same gifting or the same kind of role or working in the same way that makes us effective or qualified to serve Jesus or anything like that. It's not having exactly the same shape or all sharing the same opinions that makes us united, is it?

It is that the same Lord works through us all and that all of us acknowledge that where he leads, we should follow. 12, verse 18, but in fact, God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

[19:17] God has decided that people will have different gifts, work in different ways. It is he who has decided that there are different kinds of service, different tasks, different roles. It's from him.

What does that look like? Well, if you read through the New Testament, you'll see there's almost as many different kinds of roles and gifts as there are people.

So I'm just going to give you a few examples. Think about Philip. He's both a deacon, a kind of facilitator, organiser, and he's an evangelist. Or there's Lydia, who founded the church in Philippi with Paul, hosted and organised it.

Then there's Tabitha. Remember Peter and Tabitha? Tabitha who organised the social care and practical love in her community and people loved her for it. Then there's Aquila and Priscilla, who taught one of the biggest preachers in the early church good theology when he got it wrong.

Then there are men and women praying and prophesying in the church in Corinth. And there are all the men and women in Romans 16. That's a great chapter to look up. Basically he spends a whole chapter just listing people who he considers partners in his work.

[20:34] The Apostle Paul. Half of them are women, half of them are men. And then there's Timothy. An enormously gifted individual but needed training. He's growing, isn't he?

He's a student. All of those people had their role, their place, their gifting in God's church. As we live and serve in God's way according to our gifting, our agenda and how much we've grown, as we appreciate both the uniqueness of the individual which we see here and the way that God has chosen to arrange them, that's how we will flourish as God's people.

Just like in Eden, if you like, the first command that Jesus gives to his church is to be free. Free to organise ourselves as we like to flourish under God within his design for church.

But just as in Eden, there's also one restriction for God's church family in the garden that he's filling with flowers and again, it's given because God wants us to flourish.

Just like in Eden, that restriction is an invitation to trust God over our own wisdom and that's the restriction that we see in Titus 1.

[21:56] We see here that leadership, which is called eldership in the local church, being an elder, an overseer, a pastor, an under-shepherd, That's reserved for men. And if you look at the reading below there, 1 Timothy 2, what you'll see is that Paul doesn't ground that in the culture of the day.

He doesn't say this is for them and he doesn't ground it in the circumstances of the church. You guys have a problem so I'm going to have to put the men in charge. He grounds it in the creation

order.

Do you see that? I do not permit a woman to teach or assume authority over a man. She must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. Which men does he have in mind?

Well, if you were to read 1 Timothy 3, you would see that he's talking about elders. If you look at the qualifications for male deacons in that chapter, 1 Timothy 3, we see Paul has a parallel verse for women.

But not for elders. And the hallmark ministry of that role, which is what Paul is talking about here, is authoritative teaching in the gathered church. That is for elders.

[ 23 : 07 ] On everything else, we are free to eat from any tree in the garden. And thinking about the garden, that eldership is supposed to be like Adam's role.

Representative responsibility. Protecting the truth from the lies that threaten it. Providing spiritual food for God's family. And therefore, elders also need to acknowledge that just like Adam, it is not good for us to be alone.

We need help. And, eldership is also supposed to be like the second Adam's role. That's Jesus. And that means sacrificial service.

You see, the under-shepherds, the pastors, are to be like the great shepherd, willing to lay down their lives for the flock. Here's how Jesus describes what he wants.

He just had a dispute about who's going to be the biggest. Jesus called them together and said, you know that those who were regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their high officials exercise authority over them.

[ 24 : 15 ] Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

See, there is no glass ceiling. That's about power. There is a glass floor. That's about self-sacrifice. Now, I'm going to go out on a limb and say that there may be a few of you who are uncomfortable with what I've just been sharing from the Bible. I just want you to think about this question.

Is that discomfort coming from your heart or the individualism that we are taught out there or is that discomfort founded in God's word?

When we put God's words together, what does it look like? Some of us are visual learners, aren't we? And you're probably completely fed up with the amount of words on the screen.

[ 25 : 24 ] So here's something for you. When we put it together, it looks like this. Square with four sides. Men are supposed to be, men and women are supposed to be equal, together, different, and they're supposed to be male elders.

And what happens if you lose one of those sides? You lose the flourishing with it. Any one of them. It's a bit like this. A flower bed. A flower bed's going to flourish. What does it need? It needs marking off, doesn't it?

This is the flower bed, this isn't. It needs weeding, it needs pruning, it needs boundaries, it needs careful positional planting, the right plants in the right places, it needs protecting from pests.

With all of those things in place, then those flowers are truly free to flourish, aren't they? Then they're really free. Without that, those flowers will just get strangled and the flower bed will revert to being like the rest of the field.

[ 26 : 30 ] It's the same in the church. Paul tells us why. Two passages here. Here's that section from 1 Timothy.

Although I hope to come to you soon, I'm writing you these instructions, the ones he's just given, so that if I'm delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the church.

We do things this way because this is how God wants us to behave in his house, so that we remain orderly and that we remain faithful to the truth, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

And secondly, speaking the truth in love, we do these things, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is Christ. 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.

Do these things, will grow, will be knitted together in love and in unity, will flourish. Don't usually comment on other churches from this pulpit, but let's just consider for a moment the Church of England, which has rejected this, along with other more serious parts of God's word.

[ 27 : 57 ] Is it flourishing? Is it flourishing? How do we apply these things? Well, here's a few ideas. Obviously, we want to encourage everybody to use their gifts. We want to encourage women to use leadership gifts within that square.

Don't we? We need a leader for the women's work here. We don't assume, because of our stereotypical thinking sometimes, that men aren't looking for spaces to be vulnerable and open with each other because that's not manly.

We don't assume that. We don't over-gender our activities, right? Because some men do like craft and some women do like football and that's fine.

So we don't over-gender our activities. On the other hand, we don't throw all the single-gender stuff out the window either because we don't want to erase differences. They're God-given. And we're realistic that our sin will affect the way that we do this.

[ 29 : 05 ] We'll get it wrong. So we are on the lookout for sexism and we do try to listen to men's voices and women's voices. There's another opportunity to reflect.

Which do you find easier? The freedom of living and serving according to our different individual gifts and genders or the certainty of knowing who God is asked to lead? I think some people in the room will probably struggle with the fact that God says that elders are to be men.

I think some of us will be absolutely fine with that but we will struggle with the idea that we should step out in faith because the church needs our gifts.

So which do you find easier? And what will you ask the Lord to do in your heart in the light of which one you find easier? Can I just give you a moment? Thank you.

We're going to finish off. I just want to say I have a couple of handouts if you're interested in more detail about this which covers some common misconceptions and objections as well.

[ 30 : 42 ] So come and grab one of those off me at the end if you want to. I was reading last night and the night before I think with Corrie the account of Israel's conquest of Jericho.

You know that story? The huge walls that had to come down and the tiny army. And look that in human terms. The strategy is ridiculous isn't it?

There's no siege engines. There's no sneaking inside. The command is just walk around the walls seven times those walls that need to come down. You can think for yourself what the walls are today.

But it can feel like that today can't it? With God's design for men and women we kind of think that is not a strategy. that is going to succeed in this world. It's just going to make stuff more difficult.

But we know how the Jericho story ended when God's people trusted God's way. Trust him. I asked Annika what she thought I should say today.

[ 31 : 54 ] It was a fun conversation. Here's her answer. I think God knows best what our strengths are. And he's designed the church to show those. And women are definitely better at some things than men.

Pretty good, right? This is what Jesus taught. The Jesus who loves us. The Jesus who wants good for you so much that he was prepared to die for it.

And who came that we would have life to the full. This is a small part of what that looks like. So if every instinct in you is saying no that's not right then look to Jesus.

Put your trust in him. let's pray. Lord God, we are people of this world and we're shaped by this world born into it with all the good and bad that that includes.

And we're also your people now now that we've trusted you. And we're on a journey to becoming shaped more like you. Please will you help us, give us grace when we stumble, when we struggle.

[ 33 : 12 ] We thank you for this vision of flourishing that you've given us. The paradise that you created that you will recreate. Lord, we see the division and the difficulty and the danger as well as the good outside our doors.

Lord, and we love your vision for flourishing and we wish that more would follow it so that they too would be blessed. pleased by your Holy Spirit would you put these things in our hearts and you cause more people to be drawn towards you by your love, by your sacrifice, by your resurrection. We pray those things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.