

Four-Fold Relational Harmony

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[0 : 00] May God add his blessing to the reading, hearing, and preaching of the Word. A number of years ago, Father John Powell, a popular priest-psychologist, wrote a very helpful book entitled, Fully Human, Fully Alive.

He was building on the theological conviction first articulated by Irenaeus of the 3rd century. The glory of God is a human being fully alive.

I like that. The glory of God is a human being fully alive. Paul makes this observation. True and full human living is based on three components, like the legs of a tripod, intrapersonal dynamics, interpersonal relationships, and a frame of reference.

He will later call frame of reference vision of reality. Others will call it worldview or narrative. Powell continues, Through the eyes of our minds, you and I look out at reality.

Ourselves, other people, life, the world, and God. However, we see things differently. Your vision of reality is not mine, and conversely, mine is not yours.

[1 : 21] Both of our visions are limited and inadequate, but not to the same extent. We have both misinterpreted and distorted reality, but in different ways.

We have each seen something of the available truth and beauty to which the other has been blind. Boy, he got that right, didn't he? That's how it is. Then, Paul says this. The major point is, it is the dimensions and clarity of this vision that determines the dimensions of our lives and the quality of our lives.

To the extent we are blind or have distorted reality, our lives and happiness have been diminished. Consequently, if we are to grow, there must first be a change in the basic vision.

Which is why we are spending the Sunday mornings of this fall in Genesis 1 to 11. In the opening chapters of the Bible, we are given a new vision.

We have a story that makes sense of our stories, as I've been putting it. Every culture in every age has some kind of story to help navigate human existence.

[2 : 38] Every culture in every age has to come up with some larger narrative to help make sense of life on this planet. We simply cannot live without a compelling, clear, and true vision of reality.

In Genesis 1 to 11, we see what and who we were created to be. In Genesis 1 to 11, we hear the life-giving news, the good news, the gospel, that we did not just happen.

The universe did not just happen. And we humans within it did not just happen. We were created. Someone wanted us to happen. Someone chose us to happen. Someone made us happen. And in that someone's goodness, he then tells us a story.

A story that puts things into perspective. Now, it turns out that the story of Genesis 1 to 11 leads us to the feet of Jesus Christ.

[3 : 56] For Genesis 1 to 11 helps us understand why Jesus Christ had to come into our world and what Jesus Christ came to do. It is the dimensions and clarity of the vision that determines the dimension of our worlds and the quality of our lives.

Thus, Genesis chapter 2. There simply is no other story in all of literature, ancient, modern, and postmodern, like the story told in Genesis 2.

I wish the whole world knew this story. Because if the world knew this story, we would witness massive transformation in every sector of society.

For in this chapter, we are given an expansive picture of what it means to be fully human, fully alive. Notice how the story is introduced.

There is a shift in phraseology. We don't always catch it as we read the text. A shift in phraseology signaling a major shift in perspective.

[5 : 20] Genesis 2, verse 4. This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven.

Did you hear the shift? Did you see it? A shift from heavens and earth to earth and heavens. Heavens and earth is the perspective of Genesis 1.

The perspective of the song before the story. Earth and heaven is the perspective of Genesis 2. Heaven and earth, Genesis 1, is the vision from above, so to speak.

Earth and heaven, Genesis 2, is the vision from below, so to speak. Genesis 1, God is up, so to speak.

Sovereign over the work of creation. In Genesis 2, God is down, so to speak. Intimately engaged in the work of creation. Genesis 1, God creates simply by speaking from the throne.

[6 : 27] Genesis 2, God creates with hand-on involvement on the ground. Thus, we have in Genesis 2, God being portrayed by God, I might add.

God being portrayed by God in bold anthropomorphisms. God is portraying himself in human forms. In Genesis 2, God is a potter forming Adam out of the dust.

God is a respiratory technician, breathing breath into Adam's lungs. God is a gardener, planting trees that are good for the food and pleasing to the eye.

God is a farmer or a rancher, calling to being a wide diversity of animals. God is an anesthesiologist, as one person put it, causing a deep sleep to come over Adam.

And God is a master plastic surgeon, making out of a rib, a woman, the most exquisite thing God ever made.

[7 : 40] Should have got an amen for 50%. Heaven and earth, Genesis 1, the song from above.

Earth and heaven, Genesis 2, the story from below. Notice also the phrase, this is the account of the heavens and the earth.

Literally, it is, these are the generations of. And I wish the modern versions would leave that alone. These are the generations of. It's an important phrase that's used 10 times in the book of Genesis to break it into 10 sections. These are the generations of.

These are the generations of. Of Shem, Ham, Jephthah. Of Shem. Of Terah, father of Abraham. Of Ishmael, son of Abraham. Of Isaac, son of Abraham. Of Esau, son of Isaac.

[8 : 38] And of Jacob, son of Isaac. These are the generations of. 10 times. Now, here's why it's important to take note of this phrase. It is not simply a way of saying, Okay, now we're going to go to another chapter.

Rather, it's a way of saying, We are now going to take things deeper. In Genesis 2, 4, These are the generations of.

It's a way of saying, as Sidney Graydonis puts it, This is what happens to the universe After God created everything very good. Meaning that in Genesis 2, We have a story fleshing out.

What God means in Genesis 1. That it is very good. In Genesis 2, We have in pictographic form. What God means by very good.

In particular, We have fleshed out before us. What it means to be humans. In the image of God. Genesis 1. Let us make humankind in our image.

[9 : 46] According to our likeness. In Genesis 2, We see in almost childlike simplicity. What it means to be created a creature in the image of the creator. Last Sunday, We saw how the words image and likeness Bestow amazing dignity upon the human species.

For to be created in the image of the creator Is to be created to represent the creator in and for the creation. In the ancient Near East, Kings or emperors would take over a new area And then they would set up images or likenesses of themselves In that area as a way of saying they are now in charge.

And so, We mere creatures Have been placed in the world In God's garden As visible representations Of an ordinarily invisible reality.

We are created to represent the creator And his concerns In the created order. And the words image and likeness Also speak of reflecting.

We have been created to reflect The nature and character of God In and to the created order. The rest of creation Is to look at us human beings And somehow See the nature and character of God.

[11 : 04] What about God are we supposed to reflect? Well, the capacity to create The capacity to categorize The capacity to conceptualize The capacity to communicate The capacity to care The capacity to discern And to decide Oh, that we could live those capacities to the full limit.

But as we saw last Sunday What we were especially created to reflect About God Is God's relational existence.

Let us make humankind In our image According to our likeness The creator of all things Can use plural pronouns When speaking of himself.

The living God Is the God who can refer to himself As us And we And our That's because the living God Is not a solitary monad The living God Is a community A fellowship A relationship There is within God This I-thou Reciprocity And interaction Now Genesis is not here Declaring the doctrine of the Trinity That God Is Father Son And Holy Spirit But Genesis is opening the door To the whole process That would one day Lead to the realization That there's no way To say God Without saying Father, Son, and Holy Spirit At the center of all things Is a relationship And we were made By this relationship For this relationship To live in this relationship Relationship This is the most fundamental thing The story tells us about being human Relationship And in Genesis 2 We have portrayed for us

By the God who can say us The relationships for which he made us In Genesis 2 We have fleshed out for us The relationships that are constitutive Of being created in the image of God And we discover And we discover That we were created For four relationships A relationship with the earth A relationship with others A relationship with the self And a relationship with the living God Now as we walk our way through this story I think we're going to both rejoice And grieve Because as we see What we were originally created to be We will grieve What we have become But I trust That we will freshly long For that original Right relatedness That four-fold relational harmony For which the relationship At the center of all things Called us into being Four relationships Earth Others Self [13:53] And God Okay So here we go First relationship The earth We were created For a relationship With the earth Genesis 2:7 The Lord God Formed man Out of the dust Of the ground The story emphasizes This relationship By a play on words The word for man Is Adam Or Adam The word for ground Is Adamah Adam Adamah Adam is from the Adamah Adam is of the earth This play on words Comes into the English language In human And humus Human Is from the humus Earthlings Are from the earth And what Genesis 2 Is telling us Is that we are not yet Fully human Unless we have this Relationship with our bodies We were formed For the bodies Fully human Fully alive Means an embodied existence

And the best way I know how to put that Is to say I do not Have a body I am a body I'm not me Without a body Which is to say That the problem With humanity Is not the body Oh yes Our bodies No longer work The way they Originally intended to Something has gone wrong Which we'll see In Genesis 3 And following But the problem For humanity Is not the body We cannot blame Our problems On the body We were made For a relationship With the earth We were made To be embodied creatures Now Why am I bother Emphasizing this It's because There has been a tendency Over the past centuries A tendency To ignore Or even deny This materiality Of our human Creativeness And this Ignorance Or this denial

Has led to Two opposite Non-human lifestyles Two opposite Non-human lifestyles One is Asceticism Or legalism This lifestyle says Well Since I'm not My body I'll deny I'll deny Its physical needs I'll deny Its need For food Or sex Or exercise Yes there is A place For fasting And yes in a Broken world There is a place For coming to terms With the drives And desires Of the body But I am My body And I cannot Pretend otherwise The other Non-human Lifestyle Is hedonism Or license This lifestyle Says Well since I'm Not my body I can do Whatever I want With it What I do With my body Will not affect The real me It won't affect

My soul And so we We say I can fill my body With whatever I want And it won't affect Me Or I can Give into Any of the Desires and drives Of my body And it won't affect Me And sadly We see this Non-human Lifestyle Portrayed night After night On television With tragic Consequences As Lewis Smead Once said The man who Is visiting A prostitute Cannot park His soul Outside the Hotel room Because what You do With your Body You do With you With your Soul With your Whole you This is how Dietrich Bonhoeffer Put it From the Earth Man has His body His body Belongs to His essential Being Man's body Is not His prison His shell His exterior But man Himself And is Not all of This Then affirmed In the rest Of the story And particularly The gospel Of Jesus Christ For what Does Christmas Say about Our bodies Christmas Says God Took on One God Became One The word Became Flesh And dwelt Among us Or as we Read in Hebrews 2:14 Since the Children Share in Flesh and Blood He himself Likewise Partook of The same And what Does Easter Say about Our bodies The incarnate God Rose Bodily He didn't Shed his Bodily Existence He Transformed It But

he Didn't Shed it He rose In a Body Ever To live In a Body And what Does the Last chapter Of the Story Tell us Our Destiny Is not To go To heaven And exist As ghostly Beings For eternity Ghastly Our destiny Is to go To a New heaven And a New earth More exactly A new heaven And a new Earth Is to come To this Earth And we Will be Restored To a Whole And holy Bodily Existence So whatever

[18 : 57] Else we Can say About the Christian Vision Of life Authentic Christian Living Is always Lived in And congruent With the Body Have you Ever noticed That all The spiritual Disciplines Spiritual Disciplines To which we Are called Require the Use of The body You can't Pray without Your body You can't Worship without Your body You can't Study without Your body You can't Do anything Spiritual Without your Body For I Do not Have a Body I am a Body Second Relationship Others We were Created for A relationship With other Creatures Genesis 2 18 2 18 It is not Good for The man To live Alone Genesis 1 It was Good Seven times Finally Very good Genesis 2 It is not Good It is not Good That the Man dwell Alone For we Were made For relationship

With other Creatures And especially Other creatures Created in the Image of God This is Why It is Right to Lament Loneliness It is Not good It is not Good for Us Because it is Not good For God Us Our Our Humanity In the Image of God Is Co-humanity So In one of The most Tender Speeches God Ever Makes In the Story God Says Genesis 2 18 I Will Make Him A Helper Suitable To Him I Will Make Him A Helper Suitable To Him First God Brings In All The Animals God Is Not Playing Games With Adam Here Because There is A Sense In Which Animals Can Alleviate Human Loneliness There is A Degree To Which That Is True And In Bringing In The Animals To Adam I Think God Is Showing Adam That And

Blessing That Fact Of Our Createdness Our Delight In Our Pets Delights The Creator When God Brings The Animals To Adam He Begins To Give Them Names And If You Grew Up In The Era I Did I Can't Help But Hearing In My Head That Song Bob Dillon Wrote God Gave Names To All The Animals God Gave Names To All The Animals In The Beginning In The Beginning He Did A Little Slower Though Man Gave Names To All The Animals In The Beginning Long Time Ago Then He Has All These Verses He Saw An Animal That Liked To Growl With Big Furry Paws And He Liked To Howl Great Big Furry Back And Furry Hair I Think I'll Call It A Bear He Saw An Animal Up On A Hill Chewing So Much Grass Until She Was Filled He Saw Milk Coming Out But He Didn't Know How I Think I'll Call It A Cow He Saw An Animal Leaving A

Muddy Trail Real Dirty Face And A Curly Tail He Wasn't So Small And He Wasn't Too Big I Think I'll Call It A Pig Next Animal That He Did Meet Had Wool On His Back And Hooves On His Feet Eating Grass On A Mountain Side So Steep I Think I'll Call It A Sheep He Saw An Animal As Smooth As Glass Slithering His Way Through The Grass Saw Him Disappear By A Tree Near A Lake Genesis Three Took A While For Your Mind To Get There Didn't It I Think I'll Call It A Snake Now In Naming Animals Adam Is Exercising One Of The Capacities True Of Being Created In The Image Of God The Capacity To Categorize And To Organize To Compartmentalize He's Bringing Order To His World And As David Atkinson Says Man The Scientist Is Not Too Far Behind

But In The Animals Adam Does Not Find The Helper I Will Make Him A Helper Suitable For Him Now Take Careful Note Of The Phrase Suitable For Him Helper Suitable For Him The Phrase Literally Means According To What Is In Front Of Or Corresponding To Or Equal And Adequate To That Is The Helper Who Will Alleviate This Loneliness Has To Be Both Like The Man But Different From The Man I Like How Carl Park Carl Bart Unpacks This Phrase He Says If The Helper Is Only Like Adam Loneliness Will Not Be Alleviated Because Adam Would Only See Himself If The Helper Is Only Different From Adam Loneliness Would Not Be Alleviated

[23 : 58] Because The Helper Would Not Belong To Him So God Makes Woman She Is The Helper Suitable For Adam Because She Is Both Like Him And Different From Him In The Female Human The Male Human Meets Someone Who Is Like Him But Different From Him In The Male Human The Female Human Meets Someone Who Is Like Her But Different From Her Take Also Note Of The Word Helper I Will Make A Helper Suitable To Him The Word That's Used Here Is The Word Ezra Ezra Ezra And It Comes Into A Play In Names Like Eleazar Eleazar Is Name Means God Is Helper Now An Interesting Fact Is In The Rest Of The Bible Only God Will Be Called An Ezra Only God Gets This Term From This Story On God Is The Great Help

Now Get This Because It's Crucial For Our Understanding The Creation Of Woman And Ladies You're Going To Love This Part Ezra Means One Who Comes To The Aid Of Someone In Need Which Is Why It's Used Of God God Is The One Who Ultimately Comes To Our Need Kenneth

Bailey Who Has Spent Most Of His Adult Life Studying And Teaching In The Middle East Says Of The Word Ezra That It Does Not Refer To A Lowly Assistant To The Boss Rather Ezra Refers To A Powerful Figure Who Comes To Help Or Save Someone Who Is In Trouble And Cannot Manage Alone There's An Honest Man This Guy Says Lighten Up Daryl Bailey Continues Women Are Placed By God On The Human Scene As The Strong Who Come To Help Or Save The Weak How About That For Dignity Male Humans Cannot Make It Without Female Humans And History Has Born That Out Again And Again The Apostle Paul Believes This By The Way In First Corinthians 11:9 He Writes This The Man Was Not Created For Woman But Woman For Man For Man For For Not In Order That Man May Do With Woman Whatever He Wants But Because This For Means Because The Woman Was Created Because Of Man Because The Man Was Alone And Not Able To Be Fully Human Alone Because The Man Needed An Ezra Someone Strong To Help Him Out Of His Helplessness So God Put Adam To Sleep And Took

One Of His Ribs And Out Of The Ribs He Fashions A Woman You May Have Heard Saint Augustine's Observation Of This Augustine Said If God Had Wanted A Helper Inferior To Adam He Would Have Created Eve Out Of His Foot If God Had Wanted A Helper Superior To Adam He Would Have Created Eve Out Of Adam's Head But God Wanted Adam To Have A Partner So He Created Eve Out Of Adam's Side Or As Matthew Henry Puts It Put It In The Last Century Woman Is Not Made Out Of Adam's Head To Top Him Nor Out Of Adam's Feet To Be Trampled Upon By Him But Out Of His Side To Be Equal With Him Under Adam Is Not Yet Fully Human

Until Eve Comes The Male Man Is Not Yet Fully Human Without The Female Man And This Is All Brought Out In A Play On Words In The Text Also The Word For Male Is Ish The Word For Female Is Ish Ish Ish Is Not Yet Fully Human Without Ish The Text Is Does One Have To Be Married Then To Be Fully Human Fully Alive The Text Right After God Presents The Woman To The Man Does Speak Of Marriage A Man Shall Leave His Father And Mother Cleave To His Wife And The Two Shall Become One Flesh But I Don't Think The Text Is Saying Only The Married Can Be Humanity In The Image Of God It's Simply Saying That We Can't Be Fully Human Unless Male And Female Somehow Live Together In Co-Humanity And That's What We See In The Lord Jesus Christ Never Married Fully Human Because He Had Both Male And Female Disciples Around

[29 : 00] Him So God Brings The Woman To Adam And Adam Says Like Dude This Is Amazing Actually What He Said Was This Is Now Bone Of My Bone Flesh Of My Flesh She Shall Be Called Woman Because She Was Taken Out Of Man Those Words In The Text Are In Poetic Form The First Human Speech Is A Love Poem This Is It God Not Only This Is The Helper But This Is Human Now You Done It God Third Relationship Self We Are Created For A Relationship With The Self Genesis 2:25 And The Man And His Wife Were Naked And Not Ashamed It Means We Were Originally Created To Live

In Nudist Colonies Not Naked And Not Ashamed Is A Middle Eastern Way Of Saying I Can Be Myself Without A Mask I Don't Have To Create A Whole Bunch Of False Selves To Function In The World I Can Be Who I Am And Not Be Ashamed Wow Wow We Were Created To Be Able To Look At Ourself And thus the fourth relationship, God.

We were made for a relationship with God, and it's the relationship that makes all the other relationships work. Genesis 2, 7, Then the Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

The text is telling us that unless the Creator breathes into us, we are not yet fully human. We're only candidates for humanity. We become human when he breathes into us.

Now this has at least two major implications. The first is accountability. Since it is God who shapes us, and since it is God who breathes in us, God has the right to set the rules.

[31 : 33] God has the right to set the agenda, which is the point of the trees, which we'll look at next week. God gets to tell us how to live the human life, which means it's possible to get at the end of one's life and hear the horrible words, you missed the point.

You lived it by your own agenda, and you missed the point. Accountability. The other implication is intimacy. God shakes Adam out of the ground.

This is the verb that's used later in the Bible for a potter who takes a hunk of clay and tenderly and carefully makes this beautiful, precious jar. And God breathes into Adam's lungs, through his nostrils.

God's lips touch Adam's lips. What an intimate picture. It's too intimate for some people. Telling us that to be human means to share the life of another.

To be human means to be indwelt by the life of another. To be human means to be in-breathed by another.

[32 : 48] This four-fold relational harmony is what the Bible will then call shalom. It is what the Bible means when it uses the word kingdom of God.

And it is what Jesus Christ has come in the world to do. He is all that we were made to be. He can make all four of those relationships work again.

He is the helper humanity has been looking for. And he can make us fully human, fully alive. Blessed be his name.

Let us pray. As we made our way through this story, and we'll come back to it again next week, but as we made our way through this story, which of those relationships was crying out for grace? Which of those relationships needs the grace of God for you today? I would invite you to invite Jesus Christ into that relationship and invite him to do what only he can do.