

Genesis 1:26-28 “The Beginning of the Story”

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- [0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- I am really excited not only to get to talk with these little ones, but that this fall we are going to walk through some old stories that will be familiar to many of you.
- It is not just kids who love these stories, okay? I did not make you raise your hand for David and Goliath, but a lot of you, you love those stories too.
- I want us to understand them in their own right, to love the stories for what they are and for what they mean themselves. That is part of looking at it. There is a reason these stories are so beloved and we want to enjoy them together.
- As well as I want us to follow through the Old Testament, God's unfolding story, the bigger story that these little stories are a part of.
- [1 : 02] It's the story that introduces us to God Himself and that eventually leads us to a manger and a cross and an empty tomb.
- And it's got a great ending. Some of our youth, some of our women are also tracking along this Old Testament story this fall, so that will be fun to do together.
- Many of us have been reading this chronological story all year and even though we're halfway through the calendar year, we're still in the Old Testament. Yes, if you've ever read the Bible in a year, most of your year is spent in the Old Testament and you're still in the prophets now.
- But now, all of us together get to look at 15 or 16 key stories through the Old Testament that make up that big story.
- Characters like David and Ruth, Moses and Esther. And one of the things you're going to notice over and over is the nature of the God writing this story.
- [2 : 07] He is a God who rescues and restores over and over. I hope it becomes, as we look at it, increasingly beautiful, increasingly inspiring to you who He is.
- But these first two weeks, these first two stories, we're going to find out what He's rescuing and restoring. We've got to have something there first, right?
- And why it needs to be rescued and restored. So the answer to that, to what God rescues and restores, we'll see today, is relationship.
- In fact, the reason we exist is relationship. That may sound to you like a big claim.
- I mean it to me. You don't say things like the reason we exist unless you mean to be making a big claim. Why are we here? What is our *raison d'etre*?
- [3 : 14] Our reason for being? Being philosophers have asked that for centuries. What gives us real purpose, value, meaning in life?
- What truly fulfills us? We all want to know that, don't we? So does Scotty Scheffler. Scotty Scheffler is the greatest golfer in the world right now.

I'm sure many of you heard Scotty's response recently to a question about winning and losing in golf. He said that he had won a recent tournament and now, I quote, I literally worked my entire life to become good at golf, to have an opportunity to win that tournament.

And you win it. You celebrate. You get to hug your family. My sister's there. It's such an amazing moment. And then it's like, okay, now what are we going to eat for dinner?

To become good at the sport and to have that kind of sense of accomplishment is a pretty cool feeling, he said. You know, to get to live out your dreams is very special. But at the end of the day, it's like I'm not out here to inspire the next generation of golfers.

[4 : 30] I'm not here to inspire somebody else to be the best player in the world. Because what's the point? This is not a fulfilling life. It's fulfilling from a sense of accomplishment, but it's not fulfilling from a sense of the deepest places of your heart.

There's a lot of people that make it to what they thought was going to fulfill them in life. And then you get there, then all of a sudden you get to number one in the world and they're like, what's the point?

I love being able to play this game for a living. It's one of the greatest joys of my life. But does it fill the deepest wants and desires of my heart? Absolutely not. It just doesn't satisfy is how I would describe it.

It's an unsatisfying venture. I guess what I'm trying to say is this is not the place to look for your satisfaction. At the end of the day, it's just not what satisfies me.

He said all that off the cuff. That's pretty profound, right? I mean, if the best golfer in the world is not sure that his great purpose is to play the game of golf, if he doesn't find his reason for existence there, why are we here?

[5 : 49] From what I've heard Scotty say elsewhere, he actually does know why he's here. But are some of us thinking that we'll be fulfilled when we are the best parent, the best pastor, the best engineer, the best dancer, the best servant, the best high schooler.

Is it possible that we are often confused or forgetful or negligent on the reason we exist?

I want to get this foundational purpose clear. To do that, to be clear about our reason for existence, we have to go back to the beginning of the story.

In the beginning, you know how it starts. In the beginning was God. Eternally existing, self-sufficient, relational.

And he created the entire world, right? There was nothing else there. So to be clear, this is a God-centered story, right?

[7 : 05] He's there and he created everything from nothing. Ex nihilo. He is the source of everything.

Everything is defined in relationship to him. Now a couple years ago when we looked at Genesis chapter 1, we talked more about the whole story of creation and what happens.

We're not going to do that this morning. For now, just notice that what God does is he powerfully just speaks things into existence, doesn't he? The pattern here throughout the chapter is God speaks, for example, light.

And what happens? Light. And it's good. And there's evening and there's morning each day. And that happens through five days of seas and mountains and moons and stars and plants and animals filling all of God's creation.

Just think about the wonder of that. I stood on the beach this week and watched the sunset across the ocean. You've seen a sunrise over these mountains, right?

[8 : 20] Think about it. Every animal in every zoo or aquarium you've ever been to. Every plant in every botanical garden and in every rainforest in the world.

Created because he spoke it into existence. It's amazing, isn't it? It's already amazing. It's almost beyond words for us to try to capture the grandeur of that.

But then that pattern is broken. That five-day pattern over and over all of a sudden changes to draw our attention to something even more amazing.

In verse 26. And God said not let there be. But all of a sudden something different.

He said let us make. What? What could it be that's so special? And God said let us make man in our image.

[9 : 33] 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. 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.

Listen. God made you special. No matter how old you are. Nothing else in the whole of God's good creation.

Is spoken of in this way. There is so much we could say. In the first couple chapters of this story. But I want to focus really just on one thing. In verse 28.

[10 : 41] What happens when God creates man and woman? The very first thing. Immediately he creates. And then. God.

Blessed them. Now there is a lot tied up in that one word. More than I'm going to tease out this morning. But maybe you could think about it more.

What does it mean that. What would it mean if God. The creator of it all. The one at the center of everything. Blessed me.

So much in that word. At its essence. It means we have a relationship with God. That nothing else in all of creation has. We were made.

For this special relationship with him. We didn't earn this relationship. We didn't work our way into it. It means from the very moment he created us. The posture of God. Towards humanity.

[11 : 41] Was one of what? Blessing. Of doing infinite good to us. Of giving himself to us. This is God gracing us.

Before we've done anything to deserve it. Grace is always the nature of God's relating to his people. And what could this good and gracious God possibly do.

To do the most good to us. Give us himself. Right? What else?

Commentator Derek Kidner describes God blessing us. As God turning full face to the recipient. In self-giving.

That's what blessing means. God turning his full face. To the recipient. And giving himself. The creation is good.

[12 : 42] Right? It's a good world. But God himself. Is the source of all goodness. The goodness behind all other goodness. If you will. It's all defined in relationship to him.

See God is the only active character in this story this morning. Isn't he? He's the creator. He's the king. He's the hero. And as soon as he makes us.

He blesses us. To appreciate the shock of this coming at this point in the story. You have to realize the marked difference that this is from all the other ancient Near Eastern religions.

When the Bible's written. Here's what everybody in the world was being told. They were being told stories about how the gods were always pitted against man.

That was the nature of all of the other myths going around. Where the gods used mankind as their slaves to accomplish things. Or to avoid work themselves because it was beneath them.

[13 : 46] But here in the Bible. The God who makes all things. Who is the source of all value. Builds his work. And he's doing lots of work. His work of creation builds to a crescendo.

The poetic structure of this section. The unique word choice. The heightened storytelling. Storytelling like a drum roll. It's building to verse 26. And all of a sudden what happens?

He makes mankind. Male and female. In his image. You see how our relationship to him.

Is the source of our value. It's in reference to him. That we know who we are. And then what does he do? He speaks his blessing. Before we've done anything to earn it.

It's like. If we can hardly wrap our minds around that dynamic. But I think the closest we get would be like a mother. In a hospital room.

[14 : 43] Holding her newborn baby. Who's just come out. Maybe has done nothing. If anything the baby has done what? Scream at me. Okay. That's the best we've got.

And the mother feels. I love you so much. Right. Already. Before you've done anything. Maybe you've actually just. Kind of pushed back against me.

God. Looks at us. Like that. What a marvelous. What a unique. Dynamic in that relationship. And think about that. Every week.

God speaks his word of blessing. To us. Into our lives. Doesn't he? We call it the benediction. The good word. The word of blessing.

It is the word that sends us into every work week. That launches us into anything that we have to do. Is that we are already blessed.

[15 : 43] Before any of it. In a way he does with nothing else. In all of his creation. God now says. At the end of day six.

It is very good. We were made for relationship with the God who blesses us. You were made to meet your maker.

No one and nothing else. Will satisfy. Fulfill. Or match that glorious purpose. St. Augustine said it famously over 1500 years ago.

You have made us for yourself. Oh Lord. And our hearts are restless. Until they find their rest. In you.

This is by the way. What we are talking about in our mission statement. As a church. When we say to experience. Grace. That our *raison d'etre*.

[16 : 46] Is not something we achieve. But something we receive. The unmerited blessing of God himself. The love of the creator of the universe.

Shaping our very existence. The joy of God the Father. Filling our hearts with satisfaction. It's relationship with him.

Right? That is what will eternally satisfy. Will eternally transform. Will eternally delight. Our souls. Our souls. Said differently.

Friend. Knowing this God. Relating to him. Is why you exist. It's what gives your life meaning.

And value. And if winning the masters. And making millions of dollars won't. Then doesn't it have to be something beyond this world.

[17 : 47] Beyond this created world. How about the creator? See we are in relationship. With a God who blesses us.

Because he made us in his image. To reflect him. Can you believe that? You want to talk about God made you special? What could possibly be a better gift?

Of greater value. A higher honor. Than to be made like the maker of all. Every one of us. So let me ask you personally.

What makes you valuable? Maybe you struggle to answer that question. For many of us.

We think. The way that we look. Gives us value. Do I look young enough? Cool enough? Skinny enough?

[18 : 47] Strong enough? God says no. I gave you value. When I made you. And spoke blessing over you. So now the only thing we long for.

Is to look like him. To reflect his image. We don't have to manage our own image to get value. We're already valuable. Many of us think.

That the work we do gives us value. Have I preached well enough? Have I advanced professionally enough? Have I been productive enough?

God says no. No. No. I gave you value. When I made you. And spoke blessing over you. So now you work in my creation. With dignity.

Tending and caring for it. As I've called you to do. And you do that work. With no pressure. To make a name for yourself. Or to outshine others. You're already valuable.

[19 : 50] Many of us think the power we have. Gives us value. Who listens to us. And who remembers us. And what impact we have. What influence we have.

Or how much we control. God says no. No, no. I gave you value. When I made you. And spoke blessing over you.

So now. Yeah. You rule in my world. You have dominion. That reflects my eternal. And perfectly good authority. You're not grasping for power and control. You fill the earth and subdue it.

Because you are the part. Of all my creation. That's in special relationship. With the ultimate king. To reflect my image. You are already valuable.

Do you see God's blessing in that? Can you feel and internalize the truth of that blessing? What it means is that you have value when you're injured.

[20 : 47] Or aged. You're still valuable. It means you have value when you fail. Or when you get laid off.

It means you have value when you seem insignificant. Or unappreciated. Or unnoticed. You're still valuable. You are in his image.

You're made for relationship with him. And every one of us can have that. That's God's blessing on you. So how do we reflect God's image?

As we relate to his creation. If we're made in his image. What's that going to look like for us? There are many things we could say.

A lot of books written on that topic. But in terms of today's passage. Just want to focus on that one thing. What's the first thing we know about how this God relates to the things he created?

[21 : 49] He creates. He blesses them. In his image then. We bless creation.

Don't we? We are to do good toward all of it. We must treat the places. The things. Especially the people around us. Better than they deserve.

We grace them over. And over. And over. We rule over every inch of creation. Not according to our own preferences. Or for our own glory. But after the gracious rule of our king.

For their good. And for his glory. Right? This is what it looks like for that blessing to keep flowing. For the gift of God's grace to keep on giving.

It's the prayer of Psalm 67. May God be gracious to us. And bless us. And make his face to shine upon us.

[22 : 45] Right? This is what God's people are taught to long for. It's his blessing. It's his face. To what end? To what end is all of that delighting our souls? That your way may be known on earth.

Your saving power among all nations. Let the peoples praise you. Oh God. Let all the peoples praise you. There is one who is worthy of praise.

The one who has blessed us. In order that we might be a blessing to all the peoples of the earth. That's what we mean by the way. With a second part of our mission statement.

To express grace. And these relationships that impact eternity. That we are blessed to be a blessing. That when God brings us into relationship with himself.

That first and primary relationship. We want everyone else to experience that most blessed relationship too. That's what we long for. For everyone around us. All of who we are.

[23 : 51] And everything we do comes back to him. To our relationship with the God who started it all. The reason we exist is relationship.

Before we finish I want to acknowledge that it is possible. Quite likely in fact that some of you don't believe that. That the reason we exist is relationship.

We live in a radically anthropocentric world. Where God has been displaced lately by the all important me.

What I desire. What I value. My freedom. And so some of you believe. That it's enough for us to be self-referential.

Defined in reference only to ourselves. Things like our reason for existence being our own reproduction. Our own control. Our own success at being comfortable or happy or whatever we want to be.

[25 : 04] That's why we exist some say. Let me ask you. If that's where we believe our purpose lies. How would we know if we were wrong?

If we missed our real purpose? We wouldn't. Would we? We'd have only ourselves. We'd have to in fact succeed in every way possible.

And then be as honest as Scotty Scheffler. To admit that it doesn't satisfy. That it's not the fulfilling life that we've longed for. Have you considered his testimony?

That of many other people successful by our definitions of success? Could it be there's value beyond me? Maybe. I'd also suggest that it's possible.

Perhaps even more likely. That some of you believe the reason we exist is relationship. But you haven't ordered your life that way.

[26 : 14] Knowing God more is not your daily passion. It's your Sunday pastime. It's what you tell people.

It's what you hope your kids embrace. Scotty Scheffler a few days ago. Augustine several hundred years ago.

And Genesis several thousand years before that. Are telling you that you'll end up restless. Until you make the main thing the main thing.

Until your reason for existence is actually the reason for which you live and breathe. And do whatever you do every single day. That God made you for himself.

Especially blessed. Like no other creature in his image. To hear what he speaks about you more loudly than your own voice. Or any other voice. What needs to change for that reality to be formative.

[27 : 23] To be first. To be final in your life. Is his word on your daily playlist. So that it shapes your soul.

Are you doing life with people who are actively committed to that priority. Now listen. Other relationships are vital too. Because God highly values everyone that he has made in his image.

But do you have a grace group? Formal or informal. I don't care what you call it. If it's your group of friends at school. You probably don't call it a grace group. Okay. That's all right.

I'm saying do you have people who pursue God. And who push you to live with him. And to reflect his image. And to say this is where life is.

Do you make time to listen to his spirits? Do you really seek to live on his path. And in his power. See it's not unusual.

[28 : 25] You don't need to feel alone. If you struggle with this relationship with God thing. Next week. Our second story will show us how the relationship that we were made for got broken.

Fellowship lost. The image of God in us marred. And so we're all living in the context where that relationship with God is a struggle.

The rest of these Old Testament stories are going to show us a God who won't let that stand. Who won't settle for that. Who insists on this relationship so much that he rescues and restores us at great cost to himself.

Doesn't he? See ultimately he is so committed to blessing us. That he blesses us not only in our goodness.

In that very good perfect state wherein he created us. Not just then. But he also blesses us in our brokenness.

[29 : 30] Don't forget this. When you're seeking to reflect the image of a God who blesses first. God humbles himself.

He enters into our broken world in the person of Jesus Christ. Who's the perfect image of the invisible God. And he does what? As he reflects God's image.

He comes full of grace and truth. And he blesses with his grace a world full of people who didn't deserve his blessing at all.

He disadvantages himself for our advantage. He goes to a cross to be broken himself so that we are rescued from our self-centered existence.

And have our broken relationship with God restored. So there's good news friends. For all of you who feel your relationship with God is broken in some way.

[30 : 29] Who know that we're not living consistently with the reason that we exist. The purpose for which we were created in the first place.

The answer we would give to that question. And we feel the sense of I'm not living consistent with that. Look, God has never lowered our value because of our inconsistency.

He made us special. And we remain that way. We haven't changed that in his heart. In fact, he continues to make relationship with us his number one priority.

