

### ***Core Value No. 3***

***Life in Community: Reconciliation with God in Christ is evidenced through the love for one another that prays, encourages, comforts, exhorts, confesses, forgives, reconciles and restores.***

## **LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU**

Mission is about people together. Certainly, there is an intensely personal dimension to it, but it is incomplete as a purely individualistic phenomenon. God's mission is about the restoration of relationships. It works against the context of such things as alienation, separation, isolation and hostility. It assumes that the rebellion against God's rule reported in Genesis 3 resulted in a kind of fatal loneliness. It turned out that humanity's intimate life with God was the essential "glue" that gave us the ability to live in harmony with each and with all the rest of creation. When our relationship with God was broken, all of our other relationships began to unravel, as well.

The first chapter of Genesis gives us both a picture of the intended meaning and purpose of human relationships and the damage caused by the breakdown in our relationship with God.

The first two chapters tell the creation story in two very different ways. The writer wrote down two stories that had probably been handed down for generations by oral tradition. Such traditions, in the culture of those times, were formally transmitted from parent to child, usually from the father to the eldest son, with careful attention to the main details. The stories were told around a campfire or at the door of the family tent in the cool of the evening. They were not casual stories, but stories that were deeply defining of family identity and the true nature of things. This kind of formal and precise story telling still exists in nomadic cultures and tribal villages around the world today.

The first story is a quite stylized account of six days of creation, culminating with the creation of human beings. Biblical scholars suggest that this was a radical story, given the other kinds of pagan creation stories that were making the rounds in those days. God, in Genesis, simply "said" and things came into existence at his word. This was a far cry from, say, one pagan account in which an angry god murdered his wife, chopped her up and tossed her body parts into the sea where they became islands, continents and the like. In contrast with another pagan story, in Genesis the sun and the moon are merely "lights in the sky" rather than deities to be worshipped. The story also provided a rationale for six days of work followed by a day of rest. This took on great importance to confirm the later Sabbath laws delivered at Sinai to Moses.

Let's focus on the story of the creation of man and woman. Here is the description of the place of man and woman in the natural order.

**“God blessed them and said to them, ‘be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’**

**Then God said, ‘I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move on the ground – everything that has life in it – I give every green plant for food.’ And it was so.**

**God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning – the sixth day.” Genesis 1: 28-31**

The story of the creation of human beings in Genesis 1 contains a remarkable example of Hebrew poetry that makes a radical and powerful point. Unlike English poetry that tends to make use of rhyme and meter and other devices, Hebrew poetry is marked by the use of various kinds of parallelism; that is, phrases or expressions are repeated in different ways, sometimes contrasted and sometimes in an unexpected order to heighten their emotional impact. Genesis 1:27 is that kind of poem, located near the end of a longer section of prose writing. Below is an illustration of the structure of the poem.

Line 1) God created human beings.....in his own image

Line 2) in the image of God.....he created them

Line 3) **Male and female**.....he created them.

In the first two lines, the same statements are made, but in reverse order. The third line keeps the order of the second line, but adds an entirely new expression. Rather than repeat “image of God”, it now reads, “male and female”. The poet intended to surprise the reader/hearer with something new and unexpected. His point was that the image of God (or “man” in some translations) is both male and female. This was a radical departure from the lesser place of women in stratified societies of the time and a departure from religious concepts of God in which “he” was understood to be exclusively male. The implications for the value that God places on women were magisterial and far-reaching in consequence.

The second chapter makes similar points but in a very different way. The literary or story-telling style changes completely. Chapter one seems solemn and deliberate. Each act of creation begins with “...and God said...” and ends with

“and there was evening and there was morning...” Not so the creation story in chapter 2. It “flows” differently and reads more like an intimate and personal drama than the recounting of a majestic series of events. Even the name used for God is different, perhaps reflecting a different source for the story reported by the author – or “compiler”. This is often visible in English translations. So, for example, **Today’s New International Version** uses “God” (“...and God said...”) in chapter one and “...the LORD God...” in chapter two, thus rendering the name of God from *Elohim* in one and *Yahweh* in the other.

The main point to the story is that none of the animals of creation were suitable as a helper or companion for the man. He needed someone that was so close and similar as to truly be a part of himself. When the man said in 2:23

**“This now is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;”**

It could quite properly be paraphrased as

“At last! Someone exactly like me!”

When the English text goes on to say,

**“She shall be called ‘woman’  
For she was taken out of man”**

it does a pretty good job of matching the play on words of the Hebrew text except that in Hebrew, “woman” is simply the feminine version of the word “man”. English rarely has gender visible in its grammar so the emphasis can be missed.

#### **Going Deeper:**

There are a number of scholars who question the translation of the word that is commonly known as “rib” in this story. The TNIV translators rendered it as “part of the man’s side” in verse 21 and “part” in verse 22, for example. Other scholars think that the word translated as “rib” actually refers to “an (essential) aspect of the personality” (rather than a particular bone), as did conservative biblical scholar R. K. Harrison in his lectures and in his massive (1325 pages!) [Introduction to the Old Testament](#), William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974, page 555.

In the first two chapters, we are quite struck by the shared identity and depth of similarities in the descriptions of male and female human beings as the image of God. Genesis 5:1 restates this emphasis. In Hebrew, it reads,

**“When God created *adam*, he made them in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them *adam*.”**

It may seem that we (or the writer of Genesis) are belaboring a point, but it is a “hinge point” in the Bible, many things that follow turn on it. Earlier, we wrote, “God’s mission is about the restoration of relationships.” We also wrote, “when the relationship with God was broken, all other relationships began to unravel.” Genesis chapters 1-11 chronicle that unraveling or, if you prefer, that relational deterioration. The first reported “unraveling” has to do with the most primal and primary of all human relationships; that of man and woman. The similarity, unity and mutuality in God’s design of man and woman together rapidly deteriorated to blaming, recriminations and competition for power. Yet even as the man blamed the woman (and the woman blamed the serpent) God still treated them in virtually identical ways, thus honoring their mutual identity. First, both the man and the woman were alienated from the natural order.

**3: 16a “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe...”** (Said to the woman)

**3: 17a “Cursed is the ground because of you...”** (Said to the man)

The subsequent similarities in each verse are notable:

**3: 16b “With pain(ful toil) you will give birth to children...”**

**3: 17b “Through painful toil you will eat of it (the ground).”**

The word translated as “pain” in 3: 16b and “painful toil” in 3: 17b are the same word.

Chapter 3, verse 16 describes the alienation between the man and the woman.

**“Your desire will be for your husband,  
and he will rule over you.”**

This text is old and somewhat difficult to translate, but some biblical scholars have made a good argument that this verse may describe the emergence of a competitive struggle for power. Their suggested interpretation is,

“Your desire will be (to rule over) your husband,  
and he will rule over you.”

Prior to this time, there was no need to mention the notion of equality. It was implicit because only one person, God, was in charge.

In Genesis 3: 12, the man blamed the woman, and, by extension, God himself (**“the woman that you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”**)

In verse 20, the man further distances himself from the woman.

**“The man named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.”**

As we have shown, God had given both of them the same name when he created them. Until this moment, the man’s only naming task had to do with the animals. So what is he doing by giving the woman another name? That was clearly God’s prerogative as the creator of beings that were his image and likeness. We suggest that it was a distancing act and a kind of demotion. Bearing the same name emphasized their unity and their common characteristics of shared identity. Now, the man identified the woman by one – and only one – of her characteristics, one that emphasized the difference between them - the role of motherhood. It was a functional rather than a personal name for the man to call her Eve. Furthermore, in the act of naming his wife, Adam thus positioned her with the animals rather than with himself. This pattern always gets repeated whenever people become enemies of each other. The first psychological act of war is the dehumanization of one’s opponents by “pejorative naming.” We can justify violence against them because they are not as human as we are.

We believe that world mission is deeply rooted in the crises of human relationships and in God’s solutions for them. We focused on the relationship of man to woman because we believe that it is a kind of “archetype” for all human relationships. The deterioration in all human relationships caused by disobedience to God exactly matches the deterioration of the relationship between the first man and the first woman. When the relationship of man and woman is in good shape, it has a positive effect on all other relationships. When that relationship is damaged (or “dysfunctional” in current language) it has a kind of negative, “domino effect” on all their other relationships. We don’t think this is rocket science, just plain common sense.

The story of the unraveling of human relationships continues with the story of the murder of Abel by his brother, Cain in chapter 4. In the Cain and Abel story, God has an active part. Cain was angry – and perhaps jealous – because God had favored Abel’s offering over his own. The text describes God in deep and personal conversation with Cain, warning him about the danger of sinful anger. After the murder, Cain’s punishment comes directly from the Lord and it involves both severity and merciful protection from retributive vengeance. Later in

the same chapter, Lamech boasts to his wives that he has killed a young man for causing him what may have been nothing more than an accidental injury. His continued boasting probably meant that he was saying something like, “Admire me, wives! I am worse than Cain!” Unlike the story of Cain, there is no mention of any conversation between Lamech and God at all, demonstrating an even further deterioration in the relationship between God and man.

In a surprising turn of events, however, we discover that Lamech became the father of Noah, “...**a righteous man, blameless among the people, (who) walked faithfully with God.**” Genesis 5: 9 In this, the Bible offers yet further evidence that, from the very beginning, God’s judgment was tempered by Grace. Sin may well be described as hereditary, but so is the image of God in humankind.

Arthur Glasser put it this way in Announcing the Kingdom. “Genesis begins with the origins of the world and of the human race (chaps. 1-2) and follows with five separate narratives: the Fall (chap. 3), Cain and Abel (chap. 4), the sons of God (6: 1-4), the Flood (6: 5-9: 28), and the tower of Babel (11: 1-9)...

Two opposite progressions are at work: ‘God’s orderly creation with its climax (in humanity) as responsible and blessed being(s), and then the disintegrating work of sin’ (Kidner 1967: 13). Von Rad speaks of “the spread of sin, spread of grace” motif (1972: 152-3). Sin continued to escalate and to spread and eventually brought the world to “the brink of uncreation” (Clines 1976: 133). It started with the Fall, bringing humankind to total alienation from God. Its escalation process began with a man (Adam) making disparaging remarks about his wife... to murder (Cain), to reckless killing (Lamech), to titanic lust (sons of God with the daughters of men), to total corruption and violence (before the Flood), and scattering of the race (Babel). In response, God punished with increasing severity, but not without displaying his mercy. He is the God of grace as well as the God of judgment. God’s response at Babel involved both grace and judgment, leading to the preservation but also the fragmentation of the human race. (Note: some theologians suggest that the fragmentation was an act of grace to protect humankind from its worst instincts of hubris.) Babel set the stage for God’s gracious call of Abram. By this call he established a covenantal relationship with one particular segment of the human race. This marked the beginning of his mighty acts on his people’s behalf; these interactions of God with creation and humankind outline what is commonly called “salvation history”.

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### **From simple to complex, from the common good to the will for power**

In C.S. Lewis’ wonderful book for children, The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe, evil is overcome by “deep magic from before the dawn of time”. Lewis, of course, borrowed the idea from the Bible. In the Bible, the grace of God – his

love and mercy – predate creation itself. If we had made up the story, the chances are good that the Fall would have signaled the end of the first man and woman. In our version, God would have simply “poofed” them out of existence and invented a “new and improved” model. Instead, we find God preserving, protecting and acting to save the Adams and their descendants. Ultimately, God himself bore the consequences of their tragic choices as Jesus on the cross. The entire biblical story, then, is a recounting of God’s mission to save those whom he had created in his own image and likeness along with the world in which he placed them.

As the story progresses in the pages of the Bible, we note that the expanding numbers of human beings increased the complexity of their social organization. One man and one woman grew to become a family, one family to a tribe, tribes to nations and nations to alliances of nations in competition with still other alliances of even more nations. Along the way, there are lots of other social configurations that emerge – good, bad and mixed – like social classes, ideas of separate races among humans (an entirely unbiblical concept), guilds, benevolent societies, criminal gangs, parties, groups, professional associations and many more. As they emerge, they can be seen to develop two competing characteristics.

1. Organization to try to achieve a common good (reflecting their member’s creation in the image of God) and
2. Organizations designed to amass power in order to impose their will on others (reflecting the Fall). Every human association, from the most simple – a man and a woman – to the most complex – alliances of nations – bear this dual nature of both glory and shame. The problem of good and evil, sin and righteousness, do not have their origin outside of otherwise neutral human beings. We are the problem and God’s salvation in Christ Jesus is the only remedy that the Bible offers.

Let’s bring this back, full circle, to the Core Value, “Life in Community”. We live in an entrepreneurial age marked by the glamorization of the eccentric genius and the visionary Lone Ranger. It is conventional wisdom that highly successful people are almost “required” to be somewhat sociopathic. Descriptions of visionaries almost always include the notion of large egos and personalities unwilling to be burdened by the small mindedness of the hosts of other people that surround them. They are willing to “pay the price of collateral damage” in order to achieve a larger or more noble goal, the “greater good” or “painful but essential change”. Think of the notions of “regime change” by one nation over another or of the silliness with which Donald Trump says, “You’re fired” on his television show. Please note: This is not about types of personality. We need visionaries and entrepreneurs in world mission. But we insist that the “big picture” visionaries and entrepreneurs have no place in mission service if they are unwilling or unable to obey the biblical admonition to “**Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.**” Ephesians 5: 12

Mission organizations should hope to never become like those who achieve success by means of the cavalier treatment of their members. They should not dismiss people easily. Missionaries fail. Missionaries fall into temptation and need to be lovingly confronted, forgiven and offered appropriate means for restoration, as far as possible. Missionaries make big mistakes that require difficult and costly restitution. Basically, missionaries are simply examples of people made in the image of God and sinners in need of grace at precisely the same time. To be sure, there are times when a missionary must be removed from service, but that is a very serious matter and absolutely no time to follow “industrial or professional practice” or any other way of the world. Mission practices regarding its personnel must be biblically and theologically formed rather than mere replications of prevailing institutional practices.

People engaged in God’s mission cannot serve, grow or be transformed in isolation. The processes of sanctification (growing in holiness) were designed by God to take place in community. **“Confess your sins to one another and pray for each other so that you may be healed,”** wrote St. James (5: 16). Priority should be placed, then, on missionary teams rather than on isolated individuals. Mission agencies and programs should be unwilling to recommend sending anyone who appears to acknowledge little or no need for vulnerable and honest intimacy with other believers.

To be sure, there will be exceptions. Sometimes there are not enough people available to make up a team. Some settings are too politically and/or socially sensitive to allow for the presence of more than one or two people on site. Dietrich Bonhoeffer alluded to this kind of circumstance in his book on Christian community, Life Together, Harper and Row, 1954. He wrote, “Not all Christians receive this blessing (visible fellowship with other Christians)... the proclaimers of the Gospel in heathen lands stand alone.” (Page 18) Yet even in these exceptional cases, we must not overlook the principle of life in community. Mission agencies can sponsor regular and routine encounters between pastors and caring people with those serving in relative isolation. Such folk can be encouraged and helped to find local believers with whom they can find supportive fellowship.

These are not things to be done for sentimental reasons. They are to be done because of theological conviction. The sign of reconciliation with God in Christ Jesus is reconciliation and the restoration of relationships with others. St. John put it this way, **“...if we do not love a fellow believer, whom we have seen, we cannot love God, whom we have not seen. And he has given us this command: those who love God must also love one another.”** 1 John 4: 20-21 Missionary witness is incomplete, in our view, if it does not include some visible sign of a reconciled community. This is why we are uncomfortable with the itinerant preacher or evangelist who “just preaches the Word”, but shows no indication of belonging to any fellowship or community of faith.

Our task of announcing the Good News of reconciliation with God in Christ Jesus is incomplete if it is done in isolation from the context of broken relationships that the Bible announces, as well. If it fails to make reference to reconciliation between humans – whether individuals or societies – particularly where there is division and estrangement, then the Gospel has not been announced with full integrity. It is not enough to exhort people to “pray to receive Christ” if there is no understanding that this will and should lead to receiving one another. It is our sense that the privatization and interiorization (“just God and me” – “just in my heart”) of religion in our Western cultures have damaged Christian witness and proclamation. Exclusively private and interior religion is quite an acceptable idea in our societies, but wholly distinct from what the Bible teaches.

**Key Verses:**

When was the last time that you heard a presentation of the Gospel that was as explicit about critically broken social relationships as this by Paul in the context of the very real hostility between the Jews and Gentiles of his day? **“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two (Jews and Gentiles) one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.**

**Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundations of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” Ephesians 2: 14-22**

In the end, the test for the validity of all mission endeavors will be, “Did they produce obedience to Jesus who said, ‘**Love one another as I have loved you**’.”