

**Sept 3, 2023**

## **FINDING MY PLACE IN GOD'S STORY**

Finding our place and purpose in the Biblical story

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### **Waking up in the desert**

Without the big picture, our world will be **small and temporal**. Soon, we will become **aimless** and **purposeless**. But what if we are meant for more?

It is for this reason I want to teach this series for us this season!

I want all of us to know that there is more to this life than what meets the eye. I am not willing for us to settle on anything less. I am not a kill-joy! Please work hard and enjoy the fruit of your labour! But there's more to life than just that! It is my prayer that we can discover that together in...

**WHY ON PLANET EARTH AM I HERE?**

**CONTEXT! CONTEXT! CONTEXT!**

It would be very hard to read and make sense of the stories of the Bible if we read them in bits and pieces. We will not understand why they are there and eventually lose interest. The bigger issue is... you will lose the **sense of mission and destiny that God has intended for you.**

This series aims to provide all of us with the overview of the **metanarrative** of the Bible so that you know where all the pieces fit and why they are there in the first place.

Ultimately helping us to find our **place and purpose** in the grand Biblical story!

I have adopted **N.T. Wright's** metaphor of the Bible as a **drama** in which the claim is made that **God is acting in history for the salvation of the world.**

**Act 1: The Creation**

The Establishment of God's kingdom

**Act 2: The Fall**

Rebellion

**Act 3: Israel**

Redemption Initiated

**Act 4: Christ**

The Coming of the King: Redemption Accomplished

**Act 5: Church**

The Mission of the Church;  
From Jerusalem to Rome; And Into all the World

**Act 6: Consummation**

The Return of the King: Redemption Completed

**Act 1: The Creation**

The Establishment of God's Kingdom

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**I. Who is the LORD God?**

In **Genesis 1**, the Hebrew word **Elohim** (translated simply as God in our English Bibles) is the general name for God used throughout the ancient

Near East. The Bible tells us that “God” brings the whole creation into existence out of nothing.

**Gen 2:4** This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.

Here another name begins to be used. God is now called “**the LORD God**” (**Yahweh Elohim**). This is highly unusual but it tells us who he is.

**Exo 3** and **6:1-12** shed light on the mysterious name **Yahweh** or **Jehovah**. These texts tell how God revealed Himself to Moses when He called Moses to lead the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt.

This is the title He chooses to reveal Himself as the **divine Redeemer**, the God who rescues His people from slavery and meet with them at **Mount Sinai**.

**Exo 19:4** You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.

So when the names Yahweh (LORD) and Elohim (God) are joined together, it makes the powerful point that **the same God who rescues Israel from slavery is the same God who makes all things, the Creator of heaven and earth.**

The creation narrative in Gen 1 deliberately contradicts the ancient Near East's version of how the world comes into existence (Enuma Elish) for the purpose of setting apart the **Lord God as being infinitely superior to anything He has made.**

**It also indicates that there is only one God.**

The sun being known as “the greater light” and the moon, “the lesser light” (Gen 1:16) is an example to highlight that they are **created objects** and not meant to be worshipped.

Without these distinctions, the people of Israel could easily be led astray as they enter into a new land who was used to the worship of fertility gods.

Unlike the ancient Near East's account of creation where humankind were merely made to serve as gods' servants, **men and women were the LORD God's crowning touch** in His creation and He acknowledged that it was very good on the sixth day.

Genesis creation narrative is **more than a polemic** against other creation narrative. It also aims to teach us **positively** what faith in God means for **how we think about the world** He has made and **how we live in it**. It does this in **a story form** therefore it was written in a way that made sense for the readers of those time and not to satisfy the 21<sup>st</sup> century curiosity of how God made the world.

Here we see **God is the divine source of all that is**. He stands apart from all His creation and the **fashioning of humankind** was intended to be **the high point of all his work** and had in mind a very special **relationship between Himself** and this last-formed of all his creatures.

## **II. The God Who Brings All Things Into Being**

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**Gen 1:1** In the beginning, God created...

The reading of Gen 1 immediately transports us back to the origin of everything, to the mysterious, personal Source of all that is: **the eternal, uncreated God.**

The idea of creation by the word preserves first of all the most radical distinction between Creator and creature and it also expresses the knowledge that the whole world belongs to God.

We do not know why for sure God made us along with all His blessings... **Creation is the product of His personal will.**

**The only continuity between God and his work is His word.**

This also expresses His sovereignty, again seen in the naming of His creation and its creatures.

God's creation is "good" because of His incomparable goodness, wisdom and justice. He alone is the wise king.

However, God does not hold Himself distant from His creation.

**Gen 1:2** ... and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

... like a mother bird who has given birth and will care for and raise her offspring to maturity.

God is not a monarch who rules from afar and takes no interest in His territories or His subjects. Having built His kingdom, God reigns over it in a deeply personal way.

**Gen 1 & 2 portray God as highly relational.**

**Gen 1:26** Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness...

But most dramatically, when God creates humankind, He blessed them and speaks to them directly: “Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it (**Gen 1:28**).

There is a personal relationship between the divine King and His human subjects. **God has a particular task and invites them to participate** in it with Him, filling and ordering the world, which He has given them for their home.

He even walks in the garden with Adam and Eve – showing the most **intimate, personal concern for them**, their needs and their responsibilities.

### **III. Humankind As God's Image**

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The high point of the Genesis story is the making of humankind (Gen 1:26-28). **Man and woman are creatures designed and made by God** as part of God's world.

Unique among the creatures, humankind is **personal**.

Gen 1 looks at **humankind in its relationship to the world** while Gen 2 focuses on the man and the woman **in their relationships to one another and to God**.

In **Gen 1:26-28**, God creates humankind in His image, in His likeness. Though God is the infinite Creator and humanity is merely His finite creation, there is something **fundamentally similar between them, though radically different from God**.

Humankind's similarity with God is found in **its unique vocation, its calling and commissioning by God Himself**. Under God, humanity is made to rule over the nonhuman parts of creation on land and in sea and air, as His “under kings”, vice-regents, or stewards.

We are to rule over the creation as **stewards** and protect it so that God's reputation is enhanced within His cosmic kingdom. **Psalm 8:6** expresses this wonderfully: the glory of human beings is that God has made them “rulers of the works of His hands”.

**Psa 8:5-6** You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands, you put everything under their feet;

Above all things, the human caretakers are **accountable** to the divine **Creator** of the world of which it is entrusted to their care.

To be human means to have huge freedom and responsibility, to respond to God and to be held accountable for that response. Thus, a better way of expressing the concept of humankind's dominion over creation may be to say that we are **God's royal stewards, put here to**

**develop the hidden potential in God's creation so that the whole of it may celebrate his glory.**

And if this is what being made in the image of God involves, then clearly our service for God is to be as wide as the creation itself and will include taking good care of the environment.

The passage that begins in **Gen 1:26** is often referred to as the **cultural mandate** and as we take God's creative commands of "Let there be..." and develop the **hidden potentials** in agriculture, art, music, commerce, politics, scholarships, family life, church, leisure and so on in ways that honour God, **we continue to spread the fragrance of his presence throughout the world He has made.**

However, all throughout Christian history, the debate remains – whether the **active life or the contemplative** – prayer life is better.

Here at **Collective**, the image of God holds both inseparably together!

**We image God not just in our actions but also in developing a deep relationship with Him,** just as the first couple would walk with God in the garden as their cohabitants.

In **Genesis 1**, humans are made “male and female”. A gender distinction is built into creation so that God’s image-bearers are always male or female, man or woman. That is, we always stand in relationship to one another, as well as in relationship to God.

**Genesis 2:18-25** tells the story of God’s creation of **Eve as a suitable helper and companion for Adam**, illustrating the special nature of God’s love for his creatures by providing what is best for human persons themselves.

Adam’s rule over the earth is embodied in his naming of the animals: just as in Genesis 1 God named the creation as He formed it. Adam thus has **one relationship to God and another to the animal world.**

But Adam is also made for **human companionship**. This is expressed at the deepest level in his relationship of marriage with **Eve**, a union whose intimacy is captured in the observation that these two individuals become “**one flesh**” (2:24).

Once more, humans are made for God, and also for one another, and for creation, to be at work within it, explore its potential, and care for it.

According to **Psalm 8**, it is our glory to work and so to present the image of God.

#### **IV. The World As God’s Kingdom**

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Christianity has often been accused of being otherworldly, and rightly so. But it is clear by now that the beginning of the biblical story does not encourage anyone to feel detached from, or somehow superior to, this world of space and time and matter.

The Bible depicts the world as the very **theatre of God’s glory**, the kingdom over which He reigns. The first two chapters of the Bible are very positive about the world.

Though it is **created** (not as the same level as the uncreated God), it is **always described as good**, all that exists and the tension of it all is part of God's intention, suggesting a marvellous **harmony** of created things.

Lastly, Genesis reveals **our world as existing within time**. After all, it was God who created the day and the night. In these early chapters, we do not know how things are to be developed over-time but clearly **He intends for development within what He has made**.

The man and woman are to produce children and these future generations will spread out to subdue the earth.

**The work of Adam and Eve** in the marvellous park made by God marks **the beginning of an eternal process** by which their children and their children's children are to develop the riches of creation.

Adam and Eve's royal stewardship of Eden is to be a small and beginning version of what God intends to happen to the whole creation as **history** unfolds.

**Act 2: The Fall**  
Rebellion

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But... a catastrophe of cosmic proportion took place when sin entered the world.

This calamity comes upon the creation soon after God forms it, threatening to mar the goodness of creation itself and to touch with evil every event coming after it.

Genesis 3 is the story of the **fall!**

In order to understand this chapter better, we need to first explore the type of literature with which we are dealing with.

Is it a myth?

This narrative here is part of a larger structure (Gen 2:4-3:24) introduced with the important phrase, “This is the account of...” suggesting that, for the author, what follows has to do with **what really happened.**

We have to take this chapter seriously although a talking serpent and symbolic trees are unlike any historical text we are accustomed to.

The first two chapters of Genesis evokes a sense of **peace, paradise and perfection**. To have God walking in the garden with you, what else can humankind ask for?

But the world we are in today is wounded and paralyzed by all kinds of evil. How could that happen? Gen 3 answers these questions though not with all the information we would like to have.

At this point, we do not know where the serpent comes from and how could such a creature disrupt God's good creation... until...

**Rev 12:9** The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

Part of being human is the freedom to choose. Adam and Eve's freedom to love also means they have the freedom not to love, hence they may experience **temptation**. But what would temptation involve for them?

The answer is found in the mysterious “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen 2:9). The serpent tempts them to eat from this tree, contrary to what God has told them to do...

**Gen 2:16-17** And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.’

This is the only time in the Bible that this tree is mentioned and it represents the temptation to be autonomous (from the Greek words **autos**, “**self**,” and **nomos**, “**law**”).

Adam and Eve can choose to either obey or defy God. Both have its own consequences. Yield to God’s law and they will enjoy **life** or find their own way apart from God and experience **death**.

The temptation they face through the serpent is to assert their autonomy: to become a law unto themselves. **Autonomy** means choosing **oneself**

as the source for **determining** what is right and wrong, rather than **relying** on God's word for **direction**.

Consequences of sin:

- i. **Their sense of themselves and each other are shattered.**
- ii. **They feel shame.**
- iii. **Their relationship with God is broken.**
- iv. **Hide from God in fear**
- v. **The serpent is cursed**
- vi. **Childbirth is made much harder**
- vii. **Work is made more difficult**
- viii. **Adam and Eve are driven out of Eden**

The fall into sin may remain a mystery but the fundamental nature of sin is clearly defined – **a quest for autonomy** – a desire to separate ourselves from God.

Gen 2 shows humankind in our created and **unfallen** state of relationships, where we are designed to enjoy and thrive in our relationship with God but Gen 3 focuses on the breakdown of those

relationships following the human **mutiny** against the divine King causing them to flee, be afraid, ashamed and alone.

We are made for relationship and sin's effect is to drive us apart. Adam blames Eve and Eve blames the serpent, both seek to cover their **nakedness**.

Sin undermined both the sense of self and the sense of belonging to one another. God's judgment suggests that the **social** and **work** dimensions of their lives are out of sync.

They did not die immediately after eating the fruit. Death means the distortion of relationships in general, and particularly the **end** of that one **vital** relationship with God.

It went down pretty quick. But is the story of the world going to end so soon and so tragically?

It is critical to note that even when what God intended to be perfect was so quickly destroyed, God **did not give up** His purposes for his creation and His kingdom.

- i. Adam and Eve **fled** – but God still **sought** them out.
- ii. God curses the serpent and promises to put enmity between the serpent's offspring and that of the woman (Gen 3:15). The woman's offspring will crush the serpent's head - God promises to **extinguish the evil forces** Adam and Eve have unleashed.
- iii. In Gen 3:20, God provides for Adam and Eve's shame by clothing them with skins of animals. In the Old Testament, to remove someone's clothes could signify their **disinheritance**; God's provision of clothes for Adam and Eve is a sign to them that He has **not given up** on His **purpose** for them. They are still to bear His image in this world.

With all that has happened, there is still the mysterious promise to consider, in which He has spoken of Eve's offspring, who will crush the serpent's head!