April 23/24, 2022

A Heart of Worship

Real Change: Getting to the Heart of It

Genesis 1-3

Pastor Bryan Clark

Monologue:
Let me tell you a story. It's no ordinary tale. No, it's the ordinary from which every other story hails. It's the story of God…the story of history. And no, I'm not the author. The author is a glorious mystery. But before He could put pen to page, before there was time, before there was even matter, He was there all alone—Father, Son, Holy Spirit—one God in three persons…everlasting in existence. He was completely satisfied, needing absolutely nothing. His joy was overflowing. The Son, wrapped in the arms of His holy, righteous Father; the Spirit, overshadowing all, glorifying one another. So, it begs the question: "Why would this God even bother to create the fountain of happiness?" Could He improve upon His state? Well, the joy that was within Him was welling up at such capacity that it had to be shared with a glorious society. So, the mighty Author, quill in hand, sat down to share His infinite mind and began to write His Once Upon a Time…

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." He made it all to reflect His beauty and His worth. Mountains, valleys, oceans, trees, all gladly testifying. Endless stars and galaxies declare His glory, shining. He made it all, and it was good. And to culminate His work, He fashioned man and breathes life onto His special ball of dirt. Man came to life with blinking eyes and was welcomed by the actual face of God. They walked with Him morning and night. There was peace and no such thing as shame. God said, "Be fruitful, fill the earth. You can eat from every tree, except for that one. For if you do, you will surely fall from Me."

And let's pause here and ask, "Why?" Why do this? Why give this choice? Because God was writing a story. And He was about to show the whole world the fullness of His glory. Conflict, though, enters early on in the script, with a snake in the garden doing what he does best: running his lip. Flashback to when this evil was created. He was an angel in heaven until he fell when his head got inflated—banished from God and from His endless mercies. Now he roams the earth trying to tempt us with the unworthy. So, on an ordinary day in the garden, he went to the woman and said, "Did God really say that you can't eat from every tree? He must not want your happiness. Otherwise, you'd be completely free." And pridefully, they listened. And sinfully, they took. They scorned their Creator with every bite that they took.

Injustice, my friends. This is injustice! That God could be seen, and then treated like a nothing, that man would be so willing to forfeit his joy, to dig for fleeting pleasures in the gutters of this earth. Fallen now is mankind, and sure to face his judgment—a lifetime full of pain and toil and strain and hell forever after. But God would promise to preserve Himself a people. But even in the brokenness of man… Oh! there could shine a hero.

Bryan: And so our story begins. It's a true story. And it's a story that impacts the life of every person in this auditorium this morning, deeply. Over the next several weeks, we're going to talk about real change. Not cosmetic change, but deep heart change. So this morning, we talk about the starting point. If you don't understand what we're talking about this morning, you stand no real

chance of heart change. And you stand no real chance of experiencing the life that your soul longs for. So we begin the story at the beginning, Genesis chapter 1, verse 1—five significant words:

> **In the beginning God created…** (*NASB, Genesis 1:1)

Either that's true, or it's not true. There's really no middle ground on that. It's the foundation of a Christian worldview. The Bible does not seek to prove the existence of God. It simply assumes it. As a matter of fact, in Romans chapter 1, Paul goes so far as to say that because of all that God has made, the evidence is overwhelming, to such a degree that no one could have an excuse, and say, "I didn't know there was a God." The word translated **God**, is the Hebrew *Elohim*. It's a big name for God—the big Creator God—but it's also a plural name. The Bible will go on to explain that God exists in three persons: Father, Son, Holy Spirit, what we refer to as the Trinity. So even though for all eternity God existed alone, before He created, He wasn't really alone. He existed in community with Himself. The Father loving the Son, the Son loving the Spirit, the Spirit loving the Father, loving one another, enjoying and celebrating one another. It's a concept that theologians have referred to as *The Dance of God*. The Father, the Son, the Spirit, loving and celebrating one another, for all eternity. This is the essence of life.

When we talk about eternal life, when the Bible talks about eternal life, it's not merely talking about a duration of life. It's talking about a quality of life, the kind of life that has defined God forever. The story goes on in chapter 1, verse 27, when God creates mankind:

> **God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.**

God created people **in His image**. And at the core of that image is the ability to be relational. No other creation of God is made in His image. We have both the ability and the responsibility to image or represent God to the world. At the core of that is our ability, not only to experience relationship with one another, but, ultimately, relationship with Him. As a matter of fact, ultimately, that's what you were created for, to experience this deep, life-giving relationship with God. In other words, you were made *to join the dance*.

It's quite interesting that the very first thing after He says we're made in the image of God, is followed by **male and female**. Then at the end of the chapter, He ends with these words in verse 31: **Behold, it was very good**. Chapter 2 doesn't advance the story, but goes backwards into the story and discusses more fully the creation of Adam and Eve. In chapter 2, verse 7, we're told:

> **Then the LORD God formed man of the dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.**

There is no other discussion of creation like this. When God created man, it was personal, and it was intimate. It's as if God got down on one knee, and with the dust of the ground, (the word **formed** is a Hebrew word used to describe a potter and a piece of clay) He formed Adam exactly as He wanted him, and then breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. It would be right to say that what defines life, is being filled with the very breath of God.

Then we are told that God placed Adam in a garden that He named Eden, which is a word that means *paradise*. One can only imagine the wonder and the beauty of this place. We're told it was

a place with these remarkable trees that gave pleasure both to eat from and to look at. Chapter 2 goes on then to describe the creation of Eve, and the emphasis of the text is that Eve was created out of Adam, for Adam. Adam and Eve were not two ships that passed in the night. Adam did not find Eve on a dating app. They were made for each other. Chapter 2 ends by telling us the two became one flesh, which is a reference to their sexual union. They were naked, and there was no shame. It's important to understand that that's the world as God intended it to be. That's what God wanted, and that is the world you were made for. If you've ever felt this stirring deep down in your soul that feels like, "I was made for something different. I was made for something more; there's got to be something more than this," the answer is, "You were. This is the world that you were made for."

It is interesting how much emphasis there is in the first two chapters of the Bible, on our sexuality. It is a main focus. People say, "Where does the Bible talk about sex?" I say, "Chapters one and two, the beginning of this story." Keep that in mind, because we're going to come back to that. So what happened? Well, Chapter 3 happened.

> **Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?"** (Genesis 3:1)

Now there's discussion as to whether **serpent** is a title or whether Satan actually took on the form of a serpent. It doesn't really matter either way. What we learn is he's **crafty**. He's clever, in a negative sort of way. We learn that he's the ultimate liar and deceiver. The word crafty means he's really good at it. When he says, "**Indeed, has God said,"** it would be easy to read over that without much notice. But this is a critical point in the story. The Hebrew word translated **indeed** is a very odd term. We have no English equivalent, and as far as we know, there is no equivalent in any other language. It's kind of a strange, sarcastic word, where he is questioning the goodness of God. We might say something like, "Really…really? You think God is good?"

When you begin to doubt the goodness of God, you are vulnerable to deception and lies. Life can be hard. Life can be confusing. There can be lots of things that happen in life that go beyond our ability to explain. Whether it's pain and suffering, whether it's abuse, whether it's disappointment, whatever it might be. And sometimes we begin to question the goodness of God. "Why would a good God allow this?" "Why does it have to be this way?" And as soon as I begin to question the goodness of God, I'm extremely vulnerable to the lies of the enemy. He says, **"Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?"** A lot of people think God is like that. So God creates this beautiful garden, creates these amazing trees that are full of pleasure both to look at and to eat from, but then He puts a fence around it with no trespassing signs, and says, "But stay out." That's how a lot of people view God. "God is restrictive. God doesn't want me to have any fun. A life surrendered to God is a life experiencing less because that's who God is." But of course, Eve is going to set him straight.

> **The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree, which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'"** (Ch. 3: 2-3)

At first glance, that seems like a pretty good response. But after closer inspection, we have some concerns. What God actually said is in chapter 2, verse 16:

> **"From any tree of the garden, you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it, you will surely die."** (Ch. 2:16-17)

We have three concerns about what Eve said. Whenever a Hebrew narrative repeats something, you always want to notice if there are words *added* or *left out*. The first word Eve leaves out is "God said you may eat **freely**." She leaves out the word **freely**. She's beginning to question the goodness of God. God is not as generous as I thought He was. Second of all, she says, "You may not eat from it, or *touch it*." God didn't say anything about not touching it. We refer to Eve as the first legalist. She's already adding rules, and it's indicative of the fact she's seeing God as more restrictive…less generous, more restrictive. God said, "*If you do,* **you will surely die**." It's emphatic! Absolute! But that's not what Eve says. She just says, "**You will die."** "Probably? Maybe? I don't know. So, you have three things where Eve is doubting the goodness of God. "Maybe He's not as generous as I thought." "Maybe He's more restrictive than I thought." And, "Maybe the consequences of disobedience aren't as great as I thought." Verse 4:

> **The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."** (Ch. 3:4-5)
>
> ("You won't die! God is just trying to scare you. What He's afraid of is that you will rise up and be God. You yourself could be God, and you decide for yourself what's right and wrong. You decide what's good and evil. Who is God to say that tree is off limits? Life would be better if you were God, and you decide for yourself what's right and wrong.")
>
> **When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make *one* wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.** (Vs. 6-7)

So Eve thinks about what the serpent said. She looks at the tree; she thinks, "I think life would be better with me in charge. Who is God to tell me what to do?" And both she and Adam took of the fruit, and they ate. And immediately they knew they'd been had, and their shame flooded over them like a fog. Chapter 3 ends with Adam and Eve being escorted out of the garden paradise. Josh talked about this last week. There would now be a separation between sinful men and women, and a holy God. But literally, before you can turn the page, God has already made a promise that through the seed of a woman, He would send a Savior; He would make a way back. We would once again be able to draw near. That's what Josh told us last week. If you weren't here, get a copy of the message. For our purposes, we move on then into chapter 4.

There are now two distinct paths. There is the path of those who worship God as God, which requires a heart of surrender. "You are God; I'm not. Your way, not mine. You decide what's right and wrong, not me. I simply choose to be obedient." And a second path, and that is the path where, "I will be God. I will decide what's right and wrong."

These two paths then are illustrated through Cain and Abel. Abel was a shepherd. Cain was a farmer. God invited them to bring an offering of worship. Abel's offering was accepted. Cain's offering was rejected. There's a temptation to think they brought the wrong offering. "Just fix the offering." But that's not what the text says. What the text actually says is, "God had regard for Abel, so He had regard for his offering." And God did not have regard for Cain, so he had no regard for Cain's offering. The problem is a heart problem. Abel's heart was for God. It was a heart of worship. It was a heart of surrender. Cain's heart was one of rebellion. "I'll bring an offering, but I'll bring what I want to. Take it or leave it. I'm going to come to God my way, on my terms." And God said, "We're not going to do that." One of the things I love about this story is verse 6, when God comes back to Cain and, in essence, is pleading with Cain to rethink his decision. What he really says to Cain is, "Cain, it doesn't have to be like this. Just change your mind and worship Me." Think about this from God's point of view. He has created Cain, and He knows that Cain was created for relationship with Him, that the life that Cain's soul longs for, can only be found in Him. God wants that for Cain. He's going to make a way back to paradise. He wants that for Cain. But Cain won't listen. And God tells him, "If you don't listen, the consequences will be devastating." Well, he doesn't listen. He turns around and kills his brother Abel. And as a result of that, the consequence of his rebellion is he would spend his life with his family as vagabonds, as wanderers through the wilderness, surviving day by day.

There was a French painter by the name Fernand Corman who lived in the latter part of the 1800s, early part of the 1900s. He painted a painting 23 feet long, 13 feet high. The title of the painting is simply called **Cain**. It is a depiction of what the New Testament calls *the way of Cain*. It's a life of emptiness. It's a life of misery. It's a life of destitution. You have to contrast the painting with the description of paradise, which is what God wanted for Cain. But he wouldn't listen…determined to travel *the way of Cain.*

Paul picks up this discussion in Romans chapter 1. He says that God has made Himself so evident through everything that He has made, that everyone is without excuse. No one could say, "I didn't know there was a God." But he goes on to say, "But we suppress that truth, and we choose to believe a lie. And we choose to worship the creature rather than the Creator." In Romans 1:25 Paul says:

> **For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.**

Paul, in Romans 1, says that we have rebelled against the Creator's design and His purpose. The very next thing he talks about is our sexuality—men with men, women with women. Now the point is not that this is somehow a sin beyond every sin. Sexual sin is sexual sin. Whether it's sex outside of marriage, whether it's pornography, or whether it's men with men, or women with women. The point is the symbolism which pictures the rebellion against a Creator. Now, think about this. Go back to Genesis 1 and 2. The first thing we're told about people, made in the image of God, is: **made male and female**. And the very first command in the Bible is "Be fruitful and multiply." Now think about this. Look at male and female. Look at their anatomy. Look at their biology, perfectly designed to fulfill the intent of a good Creator. But men with men, and women with women is a total rejection of the Creator. What we as a culture have said is, "No, we're not going to do it that way. God, you're not in charge anymore. You're not running the show. We're running the show. We'll decide what's right and wrong. We'll decide what's good and evil." It is a

rejection of the Creator to worship the creature. This is the same thing that's happening in this transgender movement. It is a rebellion against the Creator. “God, I know you made me a man. Look at my anatomy; look at my biology. But, God, You're not in charge anymore. We're going to worship the creature, not the Creator. And I've decided I want to be a woman, and I can choose that because I'm in charge.”

I realize what I'm saying this morning is not very popular. Lots of things I say aren't very popular. But my job is not to be popular. It's to tell you the truth about what God has said. Now we need to understand a couple of things here. Every person…every person is made in the image of God with great dignity and worth and should be treated with kindness and love and compassion. But as Christians, we need to understand there's nothing loving about celebrating someone's rebellion against the Creator. There's nothing loving about encouraging someone to travel the way of Cain. We as Christians need to understand what's going on. We live in a culture that has made a decision to worship the creature rather than the Creator, and the end of that will be devastation! Sadly, this trend of this whole transgender movement has created all this confusion, because reckless, irresponsible adults have created such confusion, and often at the expense of confused children.

Every person that struggles is a person made in the image of God, with dignity and worth. They are to be treated with love and with kindness and with compassion as we try to help them work through their confusion. But it is not loving to celebrate their rebellion against the Creator. It is not loving to encourage them to travel the way of Cain. All the studies today show that if they continue down that path, it is not better, it is devastating. Romans 1 goes on to describe, then, all kinds of consequences of our choice to be our own gods and to worship the creature rather than the Creator.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn was a Russian writer who lived mostly during the 20th century. When he was a boy, the Russian Revolution began. He remembers his boyhood under Stalin's revolution, and he remembers the old people saying, *“Men have forgotten God. That's why all this has happened.”* He himself was outspoken against the revolution. He did time in the gulag, eventually got back out, and spent a lifetime researching, studying, and writing about the devastation to 60 million people. He wrote eight volumes on the revolution. But he said, “If you were to ask me, after all my study, after everything that I've looked up, to explain what happened in one statement, I would say this, “Men have forgotten God. That's why this has happened.”

So what to do? Well, there are a couple of things. One of the things we need to understand, as parents and grandparents, is, if we don't ground our children in a Christian worldview, they are in so much trouble. This is serious business. We all have time for ball games, and all kinds of other activities. But honestly, “How much time are we spending, grounding our kids in a Christian worldview?”

So, along with my buddy, AJ, we are on a mission to try to help. We have created a children's book series with the intent of putting something in the hands of a parent that can help you ground your children in a Christian worldview. The series is called *The Land of OTT*. The first book has been out for several months, and it has been very fun to see how excited both the kids and the parents have been over the book. It far exceeded my expectations. The second book, we're actually just releasing this weekend. Eventually there'll be more, but right now, these two. It's targeted as chapter books; it’s targeted toward a first-grade reader. So, either parents can read it to their kids, or a first-grade reader could read it himself or herself. So, if you're not on the campus this weekend,

you can order them from us or you can just jump on Amazon and get them from there. But if you're here, we have a stack of them at the Spotlight booth, on the 100 level, and you can buy them today. I'll be there, and my buddy AJ who did the artwork will be there. We'd love to chat with you and answer your questions, but we're trying to provide this as a resource to help with this.

Second of all, all of us need to assess our own hearts. Do I have a heart of worship? Do I really have a heart of surrender? Am I clear that God is in charge, not me? God decides what's right and wrong. Not me! A heart of worship requires a heart of surrender. In this specific area, I'd like to invite you to think about this. "Is there an area where you're deciding what's right and wrong rather than accepting what God has said is right and wrong?"

And thirdly, for some of you, perhaps your first act of surrender would be to surrender to the truth that God says, "We're all sinners in need of a Savior." God sent His Son Jesus to die on a cross for your sins. He was buried and rose again, and God offers that salvation freely as a gift to anyone who chooses to receive it. Perhaps your first act of surrender would be to say, "I choose to believe," and invite Jesus to be your Savior. I pray that you do that today.

Our Father we're thankful that when we were lost in our sin, with no hope, You sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world. Lord, may we be a worshipping people, which means we are a people on bended knee before the Creator, surrendered to our Creator God who loves us, and wants to dance with us forever. On this we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988, 1995
The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.
Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
Copyright 2022 – Bryan Clark. All rights reserved.

lincoln berean

Spring 2022 // WEEK 1

Life Group Questions

Real Change: Getting to the heart of it. // April 23-24, 2022

A Heart of Worship // Genesis 3:1-7

Introduction

Everyone has areas of their life they wish they could change—negative attitudes or actions that always seem to come out at the worst times in the worst places. The first week of the Real Change sermon series focuses on a heart of worship. What does it take to truly rid ourselves of selfishness and pride so that we might instead possess a heart of worship? Life Group Questions are geared to help us wrestle with and process these heart issues so that real change can occur from the inside out.

To think through the main ideas in the sermon and prepare for your discussion together, we invite you to look over the questions below and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

Here are some suggestions to get your conversation started:

1. If you could change your view from your back porch, what would it be?

2. What heart issue would you most like to remove from your life and why: anger, selfishness, fear, chaos or comparison?

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
    a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
    b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
    c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you
2) Invite someone to read the passage in the group

Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

1) Beginning a new sermon series is a good time to identify your starting line. **How do you typically respond to change?**

   Read Psalm 139:23-24. **Is this a personal prayer in your life right now? Are you in a place where you desire to examine the things of your heart (with God) so that real change might be realized in your life? Why or why not?**

   What do you see as your role and God's role in the process of heart work?

2) After considering the sermon and scripture, construct a simple definition of worship. **Using your definition of worship, how then would you describe a heart of worship?**

3) Often times, it may be easier to identify a heart of worship by first realizing what it is not. The dialogue of Genesis 3:1-7 demonstrates some key components of what worship is not as the serpent and Eve devalue the goodness of God. **What questions about God's goodness does the serpent lead Eve to consider? How does the serpent's questioning lead Eve to believe in lies rather than trust God?**

   The lies of the serpent are the same big lies that define our culture today. Satan attacks the heart of the believer by causing us to question the goodness of God. He makes us think we can be like God and decide for ourselves what is right and wrong. **In one word, how would you define this type of heart posture? How do you see this as the opposite of a heart of worship?**

   Share of a time, past or present, when you have questioned the goodness of God. How did you feel more susceptible to the lies of enemy during this time? What are the lies that distracted you from believing that God is good?

4) Read Romans 1:20-25. **According to Paul, what are some key components to a heart of worship? What are some variables that should not be present in a genuine heart of worship?**

   We all have areas in our life where we tend to worship the creature rather than the Creator. **What are some things that compete for your affections? How have they caused you to exchange the truth of God for a lie?**

5) Real change starts with cultivating a heart of worship. It comes as a choice to trust God, to know that He is good and to hold on to truth in all circumstances. Most times this requires a turning from self and a refocus on God. Think of a specific area in your life that you have not yet surrendered completely to God. **What would it look like to surrender all the details of this specific area to God? How might a faithful, Christian community be a blessing and encouragement during those times when surrender is your next step?**

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

A significant part of "coming together" is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say "Amen" aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts. **Next week in your Life Group, take a few moments to share how either of these exercises may have changed your outlook on your daily life.**

Setting Your Mind on the Truth – choose a verse or passage that invites you into worship with the Creator.

Exercise 1: Read Genesis 1 and 2 daily to remind yourself of the goodness of God in the creation story. Meditate on how God intended the world to be. Identify one way you can better reflect His image to those around you that day.

Exercise 2: Go for a walk outside and listen to Genesis 1 and 2 and experience the work of the Creator in your own neighborhood. As you walk and listen, mentally engage in the following heart work.

- Affirm your choice to worship Him.
- Surrender those areas where you are trying be your own god.
- Choose next to trust God rather than self and others.