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Our View of God

Re-think Series

Genesis 1 & 2

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I don't believe there's anything more significant to your Christian walk than your view of God. A.W. Tozer once wrote, “What comes into your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you.” And I do believe that is correct. This, then, does raise the question, *“What is your view of God?*” and is it possible you maybe need to rethink that?

In April of 1992, Chris McCandless wandered into the Alaskan wilderness, where he survived for over one hundred days before he eventually died in an old, abandoned school bus. His story was written by Jon Krakauer in a book called *Into the Wild*, and later was made into a movie by Sean Penn. After the book and the movie came out, a lot of people were very critical of Chris. They called him a spoiled rich kid, selfish, who didn't care about anybody but himself, and that he had put his poor beloved parents through so much. About two decades passed, when his younger sister Carine said she just couldn't take it anymore, and she wrote a follow up book called *The Wild Truth*. In her book, she chronicles all the physical abuse, all the emotional abuse, all the verbal abuse that they, as children, experienced at the hands of their parents. Chris was wandering into the Alaskan wilderness to find a place of refuge, to try and sort all this out. In her book, she writes about a particular Easter Sunday morning. She was nine years old; Chris was 12. She said they woke up to a violent altercation between their parents down on the main level. They quietly got up, got dressed, sneaked out of the house, and they walked to church. She described church as one of the few places of refuge for them. She writes about distinctly remembering that the preacher was talking about God, and she found herself wondering, “Is God like the preacher is describing, or is God more like my dad?” It's a very profound question and a very important question.

Every single person here this morning, you were raised somewhere by someone. Whether that was a two-parent family, whether that was a single-parent family, whether you were raised in foster homes or whether you grew up in an orphanage, you were raised somewhere by someone. And that environment, whether you understand this or not, dramatically influenced your view of God. This past spring, I was having lunch with a friend of mine who's also a pastor, and he was asking me about the book I had coming out, and what it was about. I explained all that to him, and he said, “Wow, that's totally my story!” I said, “Well, tell me more about that.” He said, “Well, my dad was military and had an explosive temper. Everything was about performance, and as long as you performed, then everything was okay. But if you messed up, my dad would explode, and we literally had to avoid my dad for days until he would cool off, to be safe enough to be around.” He left; he went to college, and he met Jesus in college, but for years he struggled in his Christian walk. He said finally a Christian counselor helped him understand how much of that experience with his dad, he had projected onto God. Everything in his Christian life was about performance and trying to perform and keep God off his back. When he would mess up, he said, “I would avoid God for weeks, giving God time to cool off before I believed it was safe to be around Him.” What was sobering about that conversation is he ended that conversation by saying, “Bryan, that's been forty years ago, and I still find myself falling into the same patterns.”

What happens is, we leave home having formulated a view of God, and that view of God becomes the lens through which we both interpret Scripture and interpret the circumstances of life. This last winter I was meeting with a group of pastors, and we were talking about how to rightly interpret the Old Testament, when one of the pastors said, "Most of my life, I've just seen God as an angry, wrathful, judgmental God in the Old Testament. It was only recently I began to see the kindness, and the patience, and the goodness of God in the Old Testament." I said, "I'm just curious. Why do you think you saw God as so angry, wrathful, and judgmental in the Old Testament?" He didn't hesitate a beat. He said, "Because my dad was that way, I just thought God was like my dad."

About a year and a half ago, I preached a message here from Genesis chapter 22. It's the story where God calls Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. And I know from preaching that over the years, that some people are absolutely horrified by that text. They see God as cruel, as demanding, as unkind. They think, "What kind of a god would ask a father to do something like that?" What's happening is, they already have a messed-up view of God. So, when they read a passage like that, they interpret it through that lens, and that's how they view God. This, then, just causes them to have an even more confused view of God. But it isn't just the lens through which we view Scripture, it's the lens through which we interpret the circumstances of life. This is a fallen world. It can be very confusing and difficult and painful at times. A few years ago, I was talking to a dad who had lost a child, and he said to me, "I know why my child died." I said, "Really? Why is that?" He said, "Because God is punishing me for all my past sins." Think about that. That is an absolutely horrific view of God and you have to ask, "Where did that view of God come from?" So our view of God just gets worse, and worse and worse, and we struggle.

I'm going to suggest to you this morning that many, and I might even bump this up to *most* Christians, if they were just to be completely honest, would say, "My Christian life has been disappointing. It's never really been what I thought it would be. I have my ticket to heaven, and I'm clinging to that, but I don't feel like I've ever really experienced an intimate relationship with Jesus. And I don't feel like I've ever really experienced the abundant life." I'm going to also suggest to you this morning, that most Christians determine their view of God based on the circumstances of life, more than the pages of the Bible. And as long as that's true, that's a recipe for trouble. So just to be clear this morning, I'm not saying you *might* have learned something about God from your family of origin. I'm saying you *did*! The only question is, "What did you learn?" The reason I say that is because that's how God has designed the family to work. So, let's talk about that.

If you have a Bible, turn with us to Genesis, Chapter 1. We might as well start right from the beginning. The first five words of the Bible are:

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

Either those words are true, or they're not. But if they are true, that changes everything. If those words are true, then we should both understand and respect God's design and purpose for marriage and family.

For our purposes, then, we move it up then to chapter 1, verse 26:

> **Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image."**

If you just started reading Genesis chapter one, there's kind of a rhythm to the description of each day of creation. But when you get to verse 26, everything changes. For the first time we learn that God has created people—mankind—uniquely and specially **in His image.** The focal point of that, in verse 26, is found in that God describes Himself using plural pronouns**, Let *Us* make man in *Our* image.**

You say, "Now wait a minute. I thought God was, like, one God." He is one God, but He's one God, made up of three persons: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. It's what we refer to as the *Trinity* or the *Trinitarian* nature of God. Now, we could spend the next several months talking about God as the Trinity, and there would never come a moment in that discussion where you would ever say, "Oh, okay, I get it." *(laughter)* It's just mysterious; it's so far beyond us. But it's also very important. Think of it this way. Almost every attribute of God that we cling to in our hour of need, is a relational attribute. So take, for example, the idea that God is love. Our theology is not simply that God is loving. It's not that, at some point, God became love. It's that God *is* love. It's His essence; it's who He is. As a matter of fact, all love ultimately finds its origin in the character of God. So how is that possible if, until God created, He was all alone? Well, because He wasn't exactly alone. The Father loves the Son. The Son loves the Spirit. The Spirit loves the Father. They love one another; they celebrate one another; they enjoy one another. Theologians have referred to this with a Greek word, *perichoresis*, the word from which we get our English word *choreography*, basically meaning *the dance of God*. For all eternity, God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit have enjoyed and delighted in this relationship with one another. When the New Testament talks about eternal life, it's not just talking about a duration of life. It's talking about a quality of life, the very life that has defined God forever. The staggering thing about what was said in Verse 26 is that we, as people made in the image of God, were actually created, uniquely, with the capacity to join the dance. That's what you were made for. That's what your soul longs for. Verse 27:

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

If you were to turn verse 27 into your English professor, it would come back with a big red "R", meaning *redundant*, but that's actually a Hebrew technique in order to make a point. There are three phrases, and the point of emphasis is what's at the beginning of each phrase. **God created in His image.** Second one, **…in His image, He created**. Third one, **…male and female, He created them**. So, God **created**…**in His image**…**male and female**. Somehow, who we are as male and female, will have something to do with our capacity to experience intimacy with God. Verse 28:

> **God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth…"**

Sometimes people ask me the question, "Where does the Bible talk about sex?" My answer is always, "Page one. It's actually the first command in the Bible. **Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth**. Chapter one then ends in Verse 31:

> **God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good."**

We move on then to Chapter 2, Verse 7:

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

I think when you come out of Chapter 1, it feels like God is so big. I mean, "How big must this God be if He created the universe with a spoken word?" He feels unknowable. But when you get into chapter 2, God becomes very intimate. I'd go so far as saying uncomfortably intimate. The best way to understand Genesis, chapter 2, is to understand we don't go forward in the story. We go backward in the story. We go back into day six, and we look more specifically at what transpired on day six. One of the ways to understand the theology of the first several chapters of Genesis is to notice the names for God.

So, in Genesis chapter 1, there's only one name for God, and that's the Hebrew *Elohim*, the big creator God—capital "G", small "od". But once you move into chapter 2, verse 7, for the first time in the Bible, we are introduced to LORD God, and you notice LORD is all capital letters. That's always indicative of the Hebrew *Yahweh*. Yahweh is the God who is personal, the God who is intimate. He's the God who makes promises and covenants with His people. When the text says that God **formed man**, that Hebrew word translated **formed** is a word that was used to describe a potter with a piece of clay. The rest of creation, God *spoke* into place. But when it was time to create man, it's as if God gets down on one knee, He pulls together the clay, and He begins to mold and shape Adam exactly the way He wanted him. It's a very personal, intimate moment. Then the text says He **breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.** The imagery is very intimate. It's as if God puts His lips on Adam's nostrils and blows breath into his lungs. It would be theologically correct to say that **life** could be defined as *being filled with the very breath of God*. It's a very intimate moment. We move forward then to Chapter 2, verse 18:

> **Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."**

Now this is quite a stunning moment in the text. It would be right to say this is the first time, in all eternity, these words, **"It is not good…"** were ever uttered. It's also rather confusing because we learned in chapter 1, verse 31, at the end of day six, God said, **"It is very good."** So, something happens in day six that's going to move us from, "**It is not good,**" to, "**It is very good.**" We don't have to guess what the problem is. The text tells us that Adam was alone. There was no other creation of God that could meet Adam's deep need for relationship. So the text says, **"I will make him a helper.** I don't really care for that translation. It kind of seems to suggest that what Adam needed was a little helper to go along behind him, pick up his socks, and cook his food. *(laughter)* Trust me! That is not what the word means. It's actually a very powerful Hebrew word. It's a word God uses to describe Himself as the helper of Israel. It carries much more the idea of an ally. He says a **helper suitable**. I don't care for that term, either. I think for us, in 21st century English, that word carries the idea of, "Ah, she'll do. She's *suitable*." *(laughter)* That's not what the word means. It would be better translated *corresponding to*. It's the idea that there was nothing else in creation that corresponded to Adam as a person made in the image of God with whom he could meet his deepest relational needs.

The text then goes on, and we learn about Adam naming the animals. And I think, as readers, that's kind of frustrating…because I don't care. I don't care what you call a hippopotamus. I don't care what you call an elephant. Poor Adam is alone. Someone needs to do something! But that is the point. The point that's being made is, there is no other creation of God that could meet Adam's needs. As a matter of fact, that's how that paragraph ends at the end of verse 20:

> **…but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. The man said,**
>
> **"This is now bone of my bones,**
> **And flesh of my flesh;**
> **She shall be called Woman,**
> **Because she was taken out of the man."** (Vs. 20b-23)

So anytime I read that text, I have to smile a little bit. I think we as men would say, "This is one of the greatest moments in creative history…when God created woman," yet Adam slept through the whole thing. *(laughter)* And some of you ladies are thinking, "That sounds about right." *(laughter)* What a strange thing to say. As a matter of fact, it's repeated. The text tells us twice that Adam slept. What is the point of that? It's actually a very important point. Marriage was not Adam's idea. They were not two ships that passed in the night. Adam didn't find Eve on a dating app. Marriage was God's idea. Adam slept. But there's a couple of other questions that are curious. "Why did God need a rib to work with?" He just created the entire universe out of nothing. So why does He need a rib? It's repeated four times in those short verses. Why does that matter? And second of all, "Why were the man and woman created at two completely different times?" Do you suppose God created the man, and then later in the day saw Adam under a tree crying because he was so lonely, and He thought, "Oh, what was I thinking? Maybe I'll create a woman?" I don't think so. So, we have to wrestle with, "What is the point that He created two completely different ways, and at two completely different times?"

Well, let's think about what we know. What we know is, in the beginning there was God, and all of creation has come *out of* God. And at the center of that creation, *out of* God was man, created in the image of God, to experience an intimate relationship with Him. Then what we know that existed was: man, and *out of* man, God created woman, specifically to experience an intimate relationship with him. And all of a sudden, we see the imagery. We see the picture that marriage is meant to be a picture, an imagery, of the ultimate love story. Ultimately, what our souls long for is a relationship with God. But that's complicated. God is so big, and He's a spirit being. So, what God created was a place where we could learn what it means to have relationship. We could experience intimacy; we could get a taste of that, in order to better understand what it means to experience intimacy with God. That's God's design and purpose for marriage. Think of it this way. The relationship with God, the relationship my soul longs for, that's the big dance, but that's pretty complicated. You can't just show up to the big dance if you don't know how to dance. So somewhere we need dance lessons, and God intended marriage to be the place where we learn to dance, in order that we might ultimately know God more deeply. What else is worth noting is, that was God's design before the fall; that was God's design for marriage right from the beginning. So, verse 24, says:

> **For this reason…** (That's one of those little phrases that would be easy to read over and not even notice). **For this reason**… (For what reason? For the reason I just told you. Because this is the purpose of marriage). **For this reason, a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and we're not ashamed.** (Vs. 24-25)

So it looks like this. A man and a woman come together in marriage. They experience intimacy which brings forth children. Children grow up; they leave home. They then meet partners, and they experience intimacy, and they have children. So, marriage leads to family. Family leads to a family of families. And this is how we are to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. But here's the critical point! The purpose is not to simply fill the earth with lots of people. If that was the point, God could have just created lots of people. The purpose is to be fruitful…and multiply…and fill the earth with *worshipers of God*. Marriage and the family are designed to be the place where God is learned, where God is experienced, where God is pictured. The purpose of the family is to perpetuate the kingdom of God from generation to generation to generation—in simpler English—to pass God on. Once you understand this, you see it all throughout the Old Testament.

So think about our study of the book of Exodus. When God initiated the Passover, what did God say? "I want you to do this at home. I want you to do it as a family." And the text specifically says, "When your children ask, 'Why do we do this?' you say to them, Because this is who God is, and this is what God has done for us." The concern would be that the generations to follow would not remember God. You see it when the nation of Israel crosses the Jordan River. God tells them to pick up stones and to build a monument. And the text specifically says, "***So when future generations' children ask, 'What does that monument mean?' the parents will say, 'Because this is who God is, and this is what God has done for us.'"*** Deuteronomy 6 is probably the classic text. The big concern in the book of Deuteronomy is that the children of Israel will enter into a land flowing with milk and honey, and future generations will forget God. And so Deuteronomy, chapter 6 says, "***You cannot let that happen. You need to remind them who God is, and what God has done."*** It says, "***Do this when you stand up; do this when you sit down; do this when you go out; do this when you come in."*** It should be the air you breathe; it should be the water you drink. It should be the DNA of the family. God's purpose for the family—how He's designed it—is to pass along a right view of God from generation to generation, to generation. But here's the challenge: *You can't pass along a right view of God if you don't have a right view of God.* So let's talk about that.

What is your view of God? Maybe you don't really think God is good. Maybe you don't really think God is faithful. Maybe you don't really think God is going to be there for you. We sing these wonderful songs with these powerful lyrics. We sing things like, "God is good all the time." And I know there's a lot of people sitting in these seats that aren't sure they believe that. We sing songs like, "God's never going to let me down," but there's a lot of people that say, "I think He has let me down. I think He's let me down quite a few times." We sing things like, "God has never failed me yet," but there's a lot of people that feel like, "I think He did fail me. I don't really know that God is good." "I don't really know that He is faithful. I don't really know that I can trust Him."

My definition of temptation is the invitation to meet a legitimate need or desire through illegitimate means. Whenever you give into temptation, whatever that temptation is, it always comes down to

one simple truth; there's never an exception to this. It always comes down to the fact: *You simply don't trust God*. You don't…you don't trust that God is going to meet this need. That's why you choose to do it yourself. The question is, "Why don't you trust Him? Why don't you think He's going to be there for you?" Or, "Why don't you think He can meet that need for you?" Maybe you feel like you always have to perform for God, that you always have to do for God. It's this relentless pressure to always perform to keep God off your back. You're afraid if you don't put out, God is going to whack you one. Maybe you don't trust God, and the result of that is you're controlling. Maybe you're fearful. Maybe you're angry. Maybe you have authority issues. If you have issues with authority, I guarantee you, you have issues with God. Why is that? Where does that come from? Maybe every time you mess up, your image of God is, God shakes His head; He rolls His eyes; He clucks His tongue, and He thinks, "Man, you are such a loser. You're just a loser, a Christian loser. You're never going to get this figured out. You're never going to get it right. I'm embarrassed that you're my child." You feel like you're clinging to your ticket to heaven, but you really feel God is mostly disgusted with you, because you're such a Christian loser. Maybe you spend way too much time in the darkroom, nursing your shame and your guilt. Maybe you're always beating yourself up, trying to convince God you're worthy of some level of forgiveness. But most of the time, when you look in the mirror, all you can think is, "I'm such a loser!"

Here's the deal. *What if God is not like that?* What if God is not like that at all? What if all of that is just flowing out of a really messed-up view of God? Here's the challenge with that. Me telling you that you may have a messed-up view of God doesn't fix anything. It's like going to the doctor and the doctor says, "Well, you're sick." That really doesn't help. It's like, "Do something; help me!" Over the years, this is probably one of the most common conversations I have with people. Ultimately, what you figure out is, "I think you have a really messed-up view of God, and often it comes from your family of origin." But just telling someone that, doesn't fix it. This was my motivation in writing my book, *God's ~~Not~~ Like That*. Is it possible to put a tool in the hands of the average Christian, where they can walk through their own unique story and begin to identify areas where their view of God may be messed up, and then work toward a more accurate view of God in order to find the life your soul is longing for? The book came out in July, and it's been very encouraging to hear from so many people how much it's helped them sort through their stuff and begin to work toward a more accurate view of God. We do have copies available. They're up on the 200 level at the publication center. They're $12 apiece, which is cheaper than you'll find them anywhere else. I do believe, with all my heart, that this can help you sort through your stuff, identify where your view of God is off, and begin to work your way toward a more accurate view of God. I do believe every person in the room can experience the abundant life Jesus promised. But to do that, you must have a right view of God. You have to know the truth…because it's the truth that's going to set you free.

> *Our Father, we celebrate this morning who You are. But, God, as soon as I pray that, I know there's just so much confusion and pain in the room. Lord, I pray that we, as Your people, would be diligent to do whatever is necessary to begin to work our way through a confused and messed up view of who You are, that we might formulate a more accurate view, to experience the life that our souls long for. Lord, that's my prayer, in Jesus' name, Amen.*

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