

OPEN – Life
Genesis 2:7-9, 15-24
January 6, 2019

Happy New Year everyone and welcome to Open, our one year journey through the Bible. We're going to discover this year that the whole Bible is one story. It begins in a garden; it ends in a city and all the way through it is about Jesus Christ. And we've chosen 50 chapters from the Bible that really trace the outline of the Bible story and our plan is to follow that story each Sunday of the year with the exception of Easter and Christmas.

And here's the goal. That through the Bible you will come to know who God is, who you are and what God offers to you in and through Jesus Christ. To those in the congregation who may be in the position of saying, "Well, I'm not sure that I yet believe." If you do not yet believe, I do want to say that this journey is for you. Think of the Bible as being like a large house and the house is open. It is an open house and you are invited this year to come and look around what is in the world of the Bible. And I want very simply to invite you to open your mind and open your heart to the Word of God and to see what God will do in your life.

If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, I want to ask you to consider inviting someone else to join you in this journey. And there are two ways to do that. First, you could invite a friend to come with you here to church on Sunday mornings as we pursue this journey throughout the year. Or second, you could invite someone to take this journey in conversation with you. I was fascinated, and actually very encouraged, to find a survey that was taken by the American Bible Society just last year and when asked the question in the survey, "Would you be interested in knowing more about the Bible?", two thirds, 66%, of all people who were asked that question, and the sample on that survey said, "Yes, I'd be interested in knowing more about the Bible." I was staggered that the number was that high. But according to this survey taken last year by the American Bible Society, two in every three people that you might meet or ask would have some openness to learn more about the Bible. At least as far as that sample is concerned.

Now that is remarkable, and I hope that it is as encouraging to you as it is to me. There may very well never have been a time in the history of our country when the Bible was less known. And it may also be the case that there has never been a time when there were more people recognizing they really don't know what's in the Word of God, where there is some interest, if asked, to come and to open the Word of God. So maybe you could be the means of asking, inviting someone to say, "You know what, I would be interested in doing that. And especially I'd be interested in doing that in conversation with you."

Now Unlocking the Bible has launched just this week a new website to help you in doing just this. It's called OpentheBible.org and on that website you will find the 50 passages of Scripture that we're following this year. You will find a 12-minute teaching on each of these 50 passages and you will find five questions that you can discuss with a friend or colleague over coffee, at home, at work. You can even do it over Skype. You can do it at a time that suits you and you can do it at your own pace. So ask

the question please: Who is there in my life who needs to know the Bible and just might be ready to open the Bible with me if I were to ask them? And remember, that two out of every three people, at least in a survey that was recently done as a representative sample across the country, said that “Yes, if you asked me, I would be interested in knowing more about the Bible.”

I hope that you will open your Bible with me then, right at the beginning at the book of Genesis. And I want you to imagine for a moment that you are in a theater for the first performance of a new play. And before the curtain goes up and the play begins the author walks onto the stage, he introduces himself, he tells you what the play is about and why he wrote it. The author does not begin by presenting an argument for his own existence. What he does is he simply walks onto the stage and he introduces himself and he introduces what you are about to see.

In the same way, the Bible begins with God, as it were, walking onto the stage and introducing Himself. Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” God introduces Himself as your creator, and being creator always carries with it the rights of ownership. If you paint a picture the picture is yours because you created it. What you create belongs to you. And God introduces Himself as your creator and therefore by definition, your owner. You are not your own. You belong to God. God brought you into being and what that means very wonderfully is that you are not an accident, you are not a mistake, you are not simply the product of random chance as it has evolved over millions of years of human history. No! This is good news! You are a creation, the special creation of God. And it is good news because if your life were an accident, if you were as it were, merely the product of random chance, that it was merely a matter of random chance that you came into being, then ultimately your life would have no meaning or purpose. And that of course would leave you free to indulge it or to waste it, trash it or even end it, because it has no ultimate meaning or purpose. It’s just a thing that happened. But what you’re being told here is that you are not an accident, you are not the product of random chance, you were created by God, and what that means is that your life therefore has meaning, significance, and purpose, and that you will find that purpose in as much as you get to know the God who made you.

So, right at the beginning of the Bible, God introduces Himself and then He tells us two things that we most need to know about ourselves. The first is that you’re made in the image of God. Verse 26 of Genesis 1, “God said, ‘Let us make man in our image after our likeness.’” Two observations: First, as you’ll see from the footnote in the Bible if you have the church Bible there the word *man* here is a generic term that includes both male and female, and you see that specifically in verse 27, “God created man in his own image, male and female he created them.” So, God created male and female and both reflect His image and His likeness.

Second, did you notice the plural pronoun in verse 26? God says, “Let us make man in our image.” That is one God, but here is a fascinating hint about His nature that is to be unfolded later in the Bible story, that He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Of course, it is later in the Bible story that this is unfolded to us, but it's actually right there from the very beginning. I wonder if you have ever noticed it's in the first three verses of Genesis 1, verse 1; "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Verse 2, "The earth was without form and void and the Spirit of God hovered over the waters." Verse 3, "And God said ..." So right there in the first three verses of the Bible, you have God, you have God's Spirit and you have God's word. The first three verses of the Bible.

Now back to verse 26. God says, "Let us make man in our image." An image of course, is very simply a reflection. What that means is that God has made you in such a way that you reflect something of His own nature and His own glory. The image of God, of course, is what makes you different from the animals. And if you were to think of yourself simply as a highly developed animal, you would miss the most important thing that God says about you. You are made in His image and in His likeness and that is why your life and every human life has unique dignity, value and worth.

So, the first thing that you need to know about yourself is that you are made in the image of God. The second thing you need to know about yourself is that you are *not* God. You are not God. In fact, you're made very fragile from the dust of the ground. Chapter 2, verse 7, "The Lord formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being." You are made in the image of God, but you are not God and the reality is that your life is actually very fragile. God made you from the dust; you live in a fragile human body. It does not take much of an accident for life in this body to cease. It's very fragile and you depend therefore on the life that God breathes into you for the life that you have.

Notice the way in which God created the first man. We're told that He made him from the dust, so a corpse, a physical corpse was made of matter. You could do a chemical analysis on the human body. God brought from the elements of the earth a physical body—a corpse—and there it was, it was lying on the ground. This skeletal frame covered in flesh, muscle and skin. And then we are told that God breathed His own breath into this corpse. In other words He gave the kiss of life to the corpse and the corpse became a living, self-conscious being. Think about what that meant for Adam. It's kind of like, you know, you suddenly come to life. You're suddenly aware—I am! And in his first moment of conscious existence he is looking up into the face of God and he knows immediately, his first knowledge is, "I exist because this God has brought me into being. I belong to Him, He has given me life. I live because of Him." And of course, what God did for Adam there, He continues to do for all of us each and every day. Acts 17:25 speaks of how God gives life and breath to all of us. We're sitting here right now and we're breathing and we're alive and why are we alive in this fragile body? Because God is giving this breath of life to us. Your life is given by God, it is sustained by God, and you will discover the meaning and significance and purpose of this life in as much as you come to know Him.

Now having introduced Himself, and having told us the first things that we need to know about who we are, God then describes for us four marvelous gifts that He gave to the first man and to the first woman, and the first of these, of course, is the gift of a home. Chapter 2, verse 8, "The Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east and there he put the man whom he had formed." There's a very wonderful

truth. God has a place for you. And we see this in the place that He had for Adam. He planted a garden and He brings Adam and He puts him in the garden. This is the place I have prepared for you. This is where I want you to know and to enjoy My blessing. Now it's difficult to be precise about the location of Eden; what really matters, though, is to remember that it was a real place. It's located in relation to four different rivers that are mentioned in Genesis 2:10-14, and in verse 14, two of them we know today, the Tigris and the Euphrates, both of which run interestingly through modern Iraq. Somewhere in that region of the world, somewhere in the east, in Eden in the east He put the man whom He had formed.

What matters is that God put Adam there, and Adam was at home because he was in the place where God had put him. And again, what God did for Adam He does for us today. Acts 17:26 reminds us that the time that we live and the place that we live is guided and provided by the hand of God Himself. Have you ever thought about this? That the hand of God is in where you live? And that the hand of God is in the fact that you live *now* rather than sometime before or even sometime in the future. No place is perfect and no time is perfect, but there is no better place and time to grow than the place and time that God has set you down. Try and imagine God walking with you into your home and saying, "This is where I want you to know My presence and My blessing." Or God walking with you into this church and saying, "This is the place that I have prepared for you to grow." Wherever God sets you down you can be at home because home by definition is where God places you.

Then secondly, there's the marvelous gift of work. We're told that the Lord put the man in the garden of Eden—why? To work it and to keep it. Now God had work for Adam to do in the garden. Work it and keep it. Later when Eve is created, God says to both of them that there is work for both of them to do, chapter 1 verse 28, that work is to "fill the earth and to subdue it." Notice this, that God gave the gift of work before sin entered into the world. Working, of course, is one of the ways in which we reflect the image of God. God introduces Himself to us in terms of His work. "In the beginning, God created ... " And then we have the description of how God worked in each of the first six days, and He looks at His work and pronounces that it is good, and on the seventh day He rests from all of His work. God works, and the man is made in His image, and now Adam is given this work to share in as well.

Notice the work he's given to do, verse 19, that the Lord had made the beasts of the field, the birds of the heaven, brings them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. Now here's something very important that arises from that: that the work that God gives, reflects the work that God does. See, God was the one who gave names to things. Right at the beginning of creation, God called the light "day" and He called the darkness "night." God names things. Now Adam is made in the image of God, and God says to Adam, now I want you to do the work that I've been doing. I want you also to participate in this naming of things, so the work God gives, reflects the work that God does. Very practically you will find that your own view of the work God has given you to do will be elevated, heightened, if you can see that the work God has given you to do reflects the work that God Himself does.

So let me give you some examples to get you going, and then you can work this out in relation to your own particular work for yourself. It will be a blessing and a joy to you, I am sure. Think of this: God

brings order out of chaos. So the next time you're clearing out a closet you should say, "I'm doing something that reflects what God does." Now, I'm being serious here, and I want you to think it through. If you bring order to a home, that is a reflection of the work of God. If you bring order to a business or to a community, that is a reflection of the work of God.

Let me give you another example. God creates that which is beautiful. Every time you engage in something that creates something beautiful, artistic, musical, whatever, you decorate! There is a reflection in your work of creating something beautiful that is a reflection of the work of God. And as you see that, your sense of the value of what is being done here will be elevated, it will be lifted.

Let me give you another example. God protects. I sometimes think about that. If I arrive here at the church at the time when children are either arriving at the school or they're leaving from one of the schools that are at either side of the Arlington Heights campus, there are folks who are there on duty, and they are doing what? They are standing in the road, and they are protecting the children so that they cross the road in safety. And I often think to myself, well, there's a reflection of what God does. It's a beautiful thing, and your understanding of any work will be lifted when you can see that the work God gives is a reflection of the work God does.

Think about this. God provides. So every person, therefore, who is involved in any way in the growing, the transporting, the selling, the cooking, or the serving of food in some way, is participating in God's great work of provision. Think about how your work reflects God's work, and you will find great joy in knowing that you have been given work to do that reflects His work also. And then think about this, which will elevate your view of work even more highly, that God is actively engaged in the work that He gives. Notice that we're told here that the Lord brought the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven to the man to see what he would call them. Isn't that marvelous? I'm so grateful for that! How in the world would Adam ever have caught up with all of these animals if God had not brought them to him? But the Lord actually brings them to Adam, "Now, what are you going to name this?" So, do you see that there is an active engagement on the part of God with Adam in the work that God has given Adam to do? Why are we being taught these things at the beginning of the Bible? We're being taught a biblical or a Christian view of work.

Think about this when you're involved in your work—that God is actively engaged in your work. He has given you work to do that is a reflection of His work in the world, and it is therefore through your work, as He works with you, that His great purpose gets advanced in the world. It's a wonderful thing! Think about that the next time you're at your desk, in the shop, on the site, or by the sink. God cares about your work, and it is through the work that He has given you to do that reflects His work, that His work in the world actually gets done. And this is why you see, for all eternity, we shall be serving Him day and night in His temple. We shall be actively engaged in His ongoing work, and it will be marvelous and it will be glorious indeed. We're going to see of course, next week that sin changed everything. And the experience of the first man and the woman was changed when sin came into the world. But, never forget this—that whatever the frustrations that may be involved in work in this fallen world, it is the good gift of God. It is the work that He has given you to do and He is actively engaged in it.

Third, the gift of relationship. What does God give to the first man and to the first woman, well, He gives a home, He gives this marvelous gift of work and then He gives this gift of relationship. Genesis 2:18, “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone.’”

Last year I had the pleasure of endorsing a new book by Drew Hunter, who is a pastor in Indianapolis, in which he, I think very wisely and rightly, applies this verse not only to marriage but also to friendship. Drew makes the point that the first problem in the world was not sin but solitude. See, throughout Genesis 1 God is creating and He looks at what He has created and He says, “It’s good.” God saw that it was good, it was very good. Now in Genesis 2:18, for the very first time God says something is not good. “It is not good that the man should be alone.” Why was it not good that the man should be alone? Answer: because he is made in the image of God, and God enjoys relationship, fellowship, love in the Tri-unity of His own nature. And that, of course, is the significance of the word ‘us’. Hinting toward the three persons. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. From all eternity before the creation there was love flowing between Father, Son and Holy Spirit—love before the beginning of time.

We live at a time when people are afraid that the only ultimate thing is power. And the Bible tells us from the very nature of God is that God is love, and that from before the beginning of time, love permeated Father, Son, Holy Spirit and that the whole of creation is an overflow of the love of God. Adam is made in God’s image, and so Drew Hunter says to be “made in God’s image means that we are wired for relationships.” To be made in God’s image means that we are wired for relationships. That’s why it says in the book of Proverbs, Proverbs 18:1, “Whoever isolates himself ... breaks out against all sound judgment.” Did you know the Bible said that? If you isolate yourself, you break out against all sound judgment. Why? Because you were made in the image of God and that means you were made for relationship. It is not good for the man to be alone. It is not good for a Christian to be alone. That is why in the church God brings us into relationship together—people who love Him brought together in order to love one another as we love Him in anticipation of the great company of the redeemed when one day God will gather together as one all who know and love Him, in and through Jesus Christ in a world in which we will know what it is to love Him and love one another fully. And the mission that we are given here is to pursue that right now.

Very clearly having said that, there is a wonderful statement here about marriage in particular. Relationship in general, marriage in particular. The Lord said, “It is not good that man should be alone, I will make a helper fit for him.” And God created Eve, and do you notice in verse 22 that He brought her to the man? God brought these two together. I’ve had the great privilege and joy as a pastor on many occasions of conducting a wedding service and, of course, the most holy and special moment is when as the pastor you have the privilege of taking his hand and her hand and joining them together and placing your hand over the top and pronouncing that they are man and wife. Those God has joined together let no one ever, ever separate. Now why does that pastor do that in the course of the wedding service? Because that’s what God did with the first couple. He brought them together. He brought the woman to the man. Joining hands, “now you love each other, now you help each other, now you walk side by

side together, you do each other good. I am making you one.” That’s what marriage is—being joined by God.

And we’re going to see next week that this marriage had more than it’s fair share of troubles. But this man and this woman could never, ever have doubted that they had been joined together by God. And if and when a marriage should come to a time of difficulty or of great trouble that knowledge will be a great strength to you. We were joined together by God. And that’s right here in the very first pages of the Bible.

So, marvelous gifts that God is giving here. He gives the gift of a home, He gives the gift of work, He gives the gift of relationship, but the greatest gift of all is that God gives the gift of Himself. I want you to notice chapter 3 verse 8, that “they heard [that’s the man and the woman] the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.” Now here’s something important and it’s a question that may already have occurred to you. God is Spirit, and that means that He is invisible to the human eye. But throughout the creation account in Genesis we read of God relating to Adam and to Eve in such a way that they could clearly see Him, they could hear Him, and they were directly able to enjoy Him. Notice they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. That could only mean one thing, and that is that God took on a visible, audible form in which they were able to see Him, hear Him, know Him, speak with Him, walk with Him. And it’s in that way that we should understand the Lord God *put* the man in the garden. The Lord God *brought* the woman to the man. Clearly here, we have what is called a theophany, in fact a whole series of theophanies. A theophany is simply God making Himself known in a visible form.

You find a number of examples of this especially throughout the earlier part of the Old Testament. And the significance of it is this. Number one, that God is showing in this way that He intensely desires to be known. He wants the man and the woman to know Him, and so He comes, and He appears in a form in which they are able to hear Him and see Him and relate to Him. In this way He makes Himself known. He does this through theophanies.

Second significant thing is this—that at the very heart of the Bible story we have something far greater than God appearing in a visible form. At the heart of the Bible story we have God actually becoming a man. And that’s what these theophanies all point to. It should come as no surprise that the God who one day will actually become a man in order to make Himself known to us, and to bring us into relationship with Himself—it should come as no surprise to us that from the very beginning this God made Himself known in such a way that they could see Him and hear Him and walk with Him in the garden in the cool of the day. One day faith is going to be turned to sight and we will see Him. And you will walk with Him, and you will rejoice with a joy that is beyond anything you have ever known in your entire life in this world.

Here’s what we should take away in these last moments from this first step in the Bible story. My prayer for our first step in the journey today is that it would be settled in your mind that God is good, that God is love, that every good and perfect gift that you experience in your life in this world and every

good and perfect gift that you will experience forever and forever comes from His hand. This is actually the essence of faith—not only that you believe in God, that you believe that God is good. Now of course, as the Bible story progresses, we're going to find that the life that God gave in the garden of Eden was lost. We're going to see how the man and the woman became alienated from this good God, and when they became alienated from God they became dislocated in their home, they experienced difficulty in their work and dysfunction in their relationships. Paradise was lost. Our life in this world is a long, long way from the garden of Eden, but what we're being told in the very beginning of the Bible story is this is what God has made you for. Let me put it to you this way. Some of us enjoy a very, very good life. And I want to say to you however good your life is in this world, God made you for something better. And some of us experience a very, very hard life and I want to say to you, however hard your life, God has made you for something more. The Bible story at its heart is about how the life that was lost can be found again. And this is why Jesus Christ came into the world. He said, "I have come that they may have life more abundantly." And the more abundant life that He's referring to, of course, is the life that was lost from the Garden of Eden. This is the life that those who follow Him will one day enjoy.

So, whatever it may cost you to follow the Lord Jesus Christ and however hard may be your experience of life in this fallen world, the promise of Jesus for all who believe in Him is that one day you will enjoy a life where you will finally be completely at home.

When you are in the presence of the Lord you will say, "You know I feel more at home than I have ever done at any time in my life." And when you are there in His presence, you will have work that will be fulfilling without frustration and will bring blessing without burnout. And you will be in a world of love where no one will be alone and where together in the presence of God we will enjoy Him forever and forever.

Father, hasten the day when faith shall be sight and we shall be in Your presence and know Your joy forever and forever, and until that day let us serve you well, knowing that every good gift we experience comes from Your hand and trusting You in all our journey of life through Jesus Christ our Savior and our Lord in whose name we pray. Amen.