

Re-imagining Life



Session 2: Whole-Life: Abundant Life

The foundations for the *Imagine* project came out of the question asking how we might reach the UK with the transforming news about the gospel of Jesus.

For this to happen, we must take seriously two challenges to the way we live out our faith. The first distraction to the call to follow Jesus is the tendency to believe that the teaching of Christ only really applies to the 'spiritual' and personal areas of our lives. This has been a constant potential distraction for the followers of Christ. However, when we read the early chapters of Genesis we are reminded again of the fact that this created world contains so much beauty, complexity, challenges and diversity and that this creation is given for people to explore and in so doing define what it means to be fully human. To suggest that God is only interested in 'spiritual' things then, begins to look not only wrong, but increasingly near-sighted.

The other distraction for us is linked to this. We need to bring the whole of our lives under the Lordship of Christ. This can just sound like a neat Christian slogan, but when we take the call seriously it means to allow the Lordship of Christ to permeate every area of our lives. It means we have to do the tricky task of asking what it means to be a disciple of Jesus in our workplace, our family situation and our leisure activities. This may look different for each of us, but for all of us it will have the same assumption: there is no area of life that God is not interested in. There is no area that God will not use to help us to grow as a disciple. So as we enjoy the beauty around us and take on the challenges of life, these are the very areas that God will use to help us grow into mature disciples of Jesus.

This demands discernment, wisdom and a determination to see everything as important to God. But it is the message of the Bible, and particularly the example shown to us by Jesus. Remember that his first miracle was to turn water into wine, at a wedding.

Not a very spiritual thing to do, was it?

Genesis 2

¹ Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

² By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³ And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

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- ⁵ and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground, ⁶ but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground-

⁷ the LORD God 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.

⁸ Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. ⁹ And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰ A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. ¹¹ The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. ¹² (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin¹ and onyx are also there.) ¹³ The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. ¹⁴ The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

Notice

As you read, notice these features:

The account of creation continues, but this time in a much more relational way, and in relation to a location. Everything is closer in the way it is explained. It does not clash with chapter 1, but provides a different perspective and widens the theological viewpoints presented.

*2: 7 The creation of Adam is expressed beautifully: God **forms** him – it reflects the work of a craftsman, with implications of skill and the relationship of creator and created. Formed from the dust - part of the natural order BUT God **breathes** on him – an intimate act, an act of giving, the act of real life that is formed when God gives of himself.*

God puts man in a place where he could discover and explore everything.

There were things that appealed to his desire for beauty (v9)

There were things that satisfied his need for food (v9)

There was a wider world to explore (v11-14)

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

¹⁸ The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

¹⁹ Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.

²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

There was work to do (v15)

There were responsibilities to care for the world (v15)

There were limitations to be aware of (v 16-17)

There were opportunities to think things through (v19-20)

Reflect

The command to Adam was to work. This has nothing to do with paid employment necessarily, but is about taking care of the world, bringing order into it, and creating a place that will sustain people. Does the work you are involved in feel like that?

What do you do – does everyone in your group know what you do, why you do it and who you work with? Now would be a good time to talk about it.

If this is part of what it means to be created, how can we ensure that these areas of our lives are fed?

Give examples of how we fill our desire for beauty.

How do we ensure we eat well?

How do we view our work?

What are we doing to care for the world?

How do we keep developing our minds?

How does 'exploring' new places help us grow as humans?

To what extent do we **really** think these things are important?

How do these aspects of our life help us to become whole-life disciples?

Think through the sacred/secular divide is there any good reason why we should allow the divide to continue?

What would change for us if we really grasped the fact that every area of our lives matters to God?



Word for the Week

Refreshing grace

And God said, 'Let the water teem with living creatures'. So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems. And God saw that it was good. Genesis 1:20,21

Generosity is a biblical theme. 'A generous person will be enriched and one who gives water will get water', says Proverbs 11:25. But only in the last 50 years or so, through film and television, have we begun to glimpse just what 'teeming' means. It's not just the sea, but also the plant life of South American jungles, the herds on African plains and Alpine flower meadows. There is infinite variety and profligate amounts of – well, tadpoles, acorns and orchids, for example. This is abundant enriching generosity, an immense creative joy, almost a sense of fun in thinking it all up and then making it – free gifts to us, the stewards of the earth.

This is our God. We are made in his image and we are called, as disciples, to grow his character. Can we be as generous too? Jesus said, 'Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you'. (Luke 6:38) In a hurried, crowded and pressured world we are tempted to guard our spaces, our relationships, our privacy and our time. We can be impoverished by a grudging meanness. Can we be generous enough to give more money, time and love than we are actually asked to give? Generous with praise and affirmation? Generous with laughter, jokes and creative enjoyment? Yet, of course, even our generosity needs wisdom and discernment, remembering that in the hands of fallen humans generosity can become a form of manipulative bribery or embarrassingly inappropriate.

Grace is the name for the overwhelming undeserved love of God in Jesus Christ. If we have experienced grace, then our response should be an openhearted gratitude that makes us generous. Like mercy, it is twice blessed, blessing those that give and those that take. And generous generosity is very attractive.

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