

God's Purpose for Humanity – Stewardship

Genesis 2:26-28
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Dr. Paul Brand spent many years as a medical missionary in India dealing with leprosy patients. Writing about his view of people so different from him, he said, “Each of us has the potential to help summon up in the people we meet the image of God, the spark of God likeness in the human spirit. Or, instead, we can ignore or squelch that image and judge only on the basis of external appearance. I pray that when I see a person, I will see the image of God inside....”

God said in Genesis, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness....” Of all living creatures on earth, God chose us and us alone to make in his own image. Why is that? What’s special about us? What’s so special about us is that God created us to be partners with him in caring for creation. After creating us in his image, God said, “Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

The Hebrew word for dominion is *radha*. In this sense, dominion does not mean dominance or exploitation, but rather it’s the act of care-giving and nurturing. We are to rule over other living things and all of creation like a loving parent, seeking the best for all concerned, for all the world.

We all have the opportunity to act in such loving and nurturing ways, in our families and among our friends, at school or in the workplace, here at church or out in the community. But how do we best do that?

Well, notice that in Genesis, the plural is used in referring to God, where it says, “Let us make humankind in our image.” When you hear that, what imagine of God comes to mind, knowing that God refers to himself in the plural, and not as a solitary being going it alone?

To me, it means that God is by nature cooperative, a sharing of power and responsibility, the essence of give-and-take, mutual support, collaborative efforts. That is who God is, and that’s how God created us to be. In contrast, the first people ever to hear the story of Genesis at the beginning of history viewed their leaders, their king as all powerful, no questions asked, and the sole representative of God on earth. And here in Genesis, God creates a sharing of responsibility and power among all people, with no one person better than another.

Created in the image of God, we are to mirror God to the world, to be an extension of God’s cooperative nature, his sharing of power and responsibility, his give-and-take, mutual support, collaborative work and nurturing care.

God is the supreme delegator of responsibility, creating human beings as co-creators with each other, guided and empowered by God. And what are we creating?

The world did not come into being as a finished, set result of creation, made to be perfect and unchanging. It was created to grow and change for the better, and we are a part of that creation, given the power and responsibility to bring it along.

God has gifted you and empowered you to bring about a better world, and in doing so, he expects us to empower others to join in this creative and redemptive work, by nurturing and supporting each other, not only despite our difference but because of them, viewing our differences as complementary and not competing.

Geneses says, "... God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." This means we are created as one flesh but different. It means that our various skills and abilities, perspectives and tendencies are not obstacles to be overcome, but blessings to be put to use.

This is true whether you're comparing women to men, men to other men, women to other women, boys to girls, adults to children, adult children to their parents. We all have differences, and God sees that as a good thing.

Speaking of differences, consider this list of rules or guidelines for women, from a man's perspective:

- Rule No. 1) We don't remember dates. Put all birthdays and anniversaries on the calendar, and remind us well ahead of time, and often.
- No. 2) Whenever possible, please say what you have to say during commercials.
- No. 3) Ask for what you want. Let us be clear on this one: Subtle hints do not work! Strong hints do not work! Obvious hints do not work! We're just not the perceptive.
- And finally, No. 4) If something we said can be interpreted two ways, and one of the ways makes you sad or angry, we meant the other one.

Yes, God created us to be one flesh but different, and to use our differences for the common good. Or as God said when blessing us at the moment of creation, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

It is a blessing – to be singled out in all creation as stewards of this world and all that is in it. And in fact, we cannot do it apart from God's blessing. In creating humanity to be fruitful and multiply, Genesis says, "God blessed them," God blessed us.

If you want to know whether you are being a good steward, a good caretaker and nurturer, look at the fruits of your labors, the results of your words and actions. Are they blessed by God? Are they a blessing to others? Are they a blessing to this world we live in?

If not, then something's wrong. If you're not feeling blessed and you're not being a blessing to others, then something's wrong and something needs to change.

Ask yourself, in what ways are we good partners with others in taking care of this world. If you're like me, your mind goes to things like raising families (whether as parents or parental figures). I think of protecting our communities and advancing society, generating goods and service, teaching and guiding, being a caregiver – things like that.

Now think of the ways we fail at being good partners and caretakers. Things like accumulating wealth beyond our needs and not channeling it for the good of all, fighting with each other, not sharing our blessings, being like those who build themselves up by putting others down, and ultimately, failing to seek God's blessing in all that you do.

God blessed us and told us to be fruitful and multiply, to multiply his blessing and fill the earth with it. To do that, we need to work together, we need to use our diversity and our different outlooks and perspectives for the common good. And that's something we can all strive to do, and something that's desperately needed in all corners of this world. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Gracious God, Maker of heaven and earth, we stand in awe of your creation. We hold in our hearts prayers for that creation – for loved ones, for our community, and for the whole world.

We lay them before you now, and ask that same Spirit that brooded over the chaos, the same Spirit that ignited the church so long ago, to be present once again in this world.

Let your Spirit whisper through some places and rush through others. Make your love and grace known to all for whom we pray, and to those for whom we do not know how to pray.

We lay before you those who are lost, grieving, sick, and discouraged. We pray, too, O Lord, for those who celebrate, laugh, wonder, and hope. We lay before you our community – the people who have more than they need, and those who do not have enough ... those who spend their days in schools, in offices, at home, in shelters, on the street, in prison – all your children. Protect them, heal them, and help us all to know one another as members of your family.

And we pray for the world – vast, intricate, and completely connected. We lay before you the polluted wastelands of this world, those people and nations torn apart by war, the children and families who go to bed hungry.

We pray your light would break into the dark places, and that you may show us how to be bearers of that light and grace, and faithful stewards of your creation.

It is in the name of Jesus we pray, joining in the prayer that he taught us, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,

as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.