

## Created for Community

Series: *The "We" Factor*

Oct. 11, 2020

Various texts in Genesis 1-3

An article was recently posted on dictionary.com entitled [8 Pandemic Words and Phrases People Never Want to Hear Again](#). What pandemic words and phrases have you had just about enough of by now? If you're watching live, go ahead and type some of those words and phrases into the chat.

Here are a few of the words and phrases mentioned in the article:

- *Social Distancing*
- *The New Normal*
- *Unprecedented*
- *Uncertain* (Gosh, we actually used the word "uncertain" in the subtitle of our last sermon series. Sorry!)
- And even though the article doesn't come from a Canadian source, it actually mentions a term infamously coined by our very own Prime Minister: *Speaking moistly*. Now there's a term we all want to forget.

Beyond what the article mentions, there are still other pandemic terms many of us have grown tired of hearing:

- *Self-isolate*
- *Pivot*. Pastor Jeremy talked about that last Sunday.
- *Bubble*
- *Anti-Masker*
- And last but not least for our purposes today— I'll start the phrase, and then you can finish it along with me: *We're all in this together!*

Here's the thing about that phrase: While we may tire of hearing it, biblically and theologically, it's profoundly true.

It fact, it speaks to the heart of what it means to be human, and what it means to be Christian.

Today, we begin a new series called *The "We" Factor*. It's all about the vital subject of biblical community. Today's society often sees faith as a private matter, but authentic biblical faith is not a "me" thing, it's a "we" thing. It's all about relationships.

We're going to get our Bible and theology on today, people, and we're going to dive into today's topic with a little Bible quiz. If you're not very familiar with the Bible, no worries— just follow along and learn as we go. The quiz consists of just one question:

**What was the very first crisis recorded in the Bible?**

Now if your first instinct is to think of Adam and Eve's fall into sin in Genesis chapter 3, you'd be in very good company.

Because when thousands of church leaders were asked this question, about 70% responded with that answer. But the fall does not constitute the first crisis in the Bible. The first crisis can be found in Genesis chapter 2 verse 18, where God utters the following words:

It is not good...<sup>1</sup>

This is the very first time in the Bible that anything in God's creation is said to be less than good. In fact, up to this point, every phase of God's work of creation has been followed by the refrain:

And God saw that it was good.

Throughout the whole creation narrative in Genesis 1, that phrase gets repeated again and again, until God finally announces his crowning act of creation:

Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."<sup>2</sup>

Now if you jump from there down to verse 31, you'll read that once God had made human beings in his own image:

Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!<sup>3</sup>

So in the Bible's opening chapter, the rhythm of God's creation of this world is:

*And it was good, and it was good, and it was good, and it was good, and it was good...  
And it was very good.*

When we get to next chapter, Genesis 2, the story of creation is repeated, but this time from more of a zoomed-in perspective.

It's here where we learn that the first man was actually created before the first woman. Which means that there's this period of time when Adam was alone in the Garden of Eden.

Well, he wasn't completely alone. God was with him, of course, which is incredible. Adam also had the company of lots of animals.

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 2:18a

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:26a, 27 (NLT)

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:31a (NLT)

But in terms of human companionship, Adam was indeed alone. And it was this state of affairs that prompted God to say:

It is not good for the man to be alone.<sup>4</sup>

Now in the flow of the biblical text, these words are meant to grab our attention.

I used to have this high school Spanish teacher named Mr. Valerio. You'd never fall asleep in Mr. Valerio's class, because he loved to shout at totally random and unexpected intervals during his lectures:

Good morning class. Please open your textbooks to page **ONE** twenty seven!

The author of Genesis wants to startle his readers in a similar way.

Because just when you've settled into chapter one's refrain that everything is good, you suddenly hear the words *it is not good* when you least expect it. And it's jarring.

Even in a setting so pristine, something was still *not good*.

The problem was the man's aloneness.

So God did something about it. Let's read what he did in Genesis 2:

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

So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he 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,' for she was taken out of man." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.<sup>5</sup>

This passage not only has important implications for marriage and relationships between men and women. Even more fundamentally, it has tremendous implications for human relationships in general.

It is not good for us to be alone— for us to be isolated from other human beings. Why? Because you and I have been created for community. **We are created for community.** In

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<sup>4</sup> Genesis 2:18a (NLT)

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 2:18-25 (NIV)

fact, just to reinforce this truth, why don't you go ahead and type "I'm created for community" into the chat right now if you're watching live?

In a message I did a few weeks ago, I cited a very recent poll which found that half of all adults surveyed say they experience loneliness at least weekly. This has of course been intensified by the isolating effects of the pandemic. But even pre-pandemic, as church leader and podcaster Carey Nieuwhof puts it:

The paradox of our age is that we've never been more connected as a culture, and we've never felt more alone.

The ache of our loneliness today is an echo of the very first crisis recorded in the Bible. It is a crisis of community.

You see, Adam was lacking a human counterpart, and therefore, human community was not yet possible. To rectify this, God creates a woman out of Adam's rib. All other living creatures, including Adam, had been made out of the dust of the earth. The woman, however, is special, made from Adam to be compatible with Adam. Together, they were not only the first male-female couple. They also formed the very first human community.

Now let's go back to Genesis 1, where it says:

So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created *them*; male and female he created *them*.<sup>6</sup>

Notice how God's image is made complete once there is a *them*—once a human community has been formed. It's only when Adam and Eve come together to form the very first human community that God upgrades the status of creation from good to very good.<sup>7</sup>

Because now there were two human beings, who together, could become one. Yes, the verse about the two becoming one flesh does have marriage in view. But even more fundamentally, it speaks to God's primary goal for all humanity. God's primary goal for humanity is loving community – for the many to be as one.

Christian philosopher Dallas Willard puts it this way:

God's aim in human history is the creation of an inclusive community of loving persons, with himself as its primary sustainer, and most glorious inhabitant.

So before humanity could truly be said bear God's image, there needed to be more than one person. There needed to be at least two—a plurality.

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<sup>6</sup> Genesis 1:27 (NIV)

<sup>7</sup> See again Genesis 1:31a

And if that's the case, it implies something very important about God's nature—about the kind of God he is.

On the basis of the careful study of the Bible, early Christian theologians articulated what we call the doctrine of the Trinity. This is the foundational Christian teaching that there is one God who exists in a loving community of three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So Christians are monotheists. We believe that there is one God.

But we believe that God's oneness is not singular or solitary. Rather, the oneness of God is the oneness of community—of loving, relational unity between three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Now scripture makes it clear that God's most fundamental attribute, his most defining characteristic, is what? It's love. The Bible says in 1 John chapter 4 that, "God is love."<sup>8</sup>

So love isn't just something God *does*— love is who God *is*. Why? Because God exists in a loving, Triune community of oneness—Father, Son, and Spirit. God. Is. Love. And because God is love, he treasures relationships.

Out of the overflow of the profound, loving community experienced in the Trinity, God says, I want to broaden the circle. This idea of community is so good, so rich, so beautiful, that I will create human beings in my own relational image and invite them to bask in loving community with me and with each other.

God is a relational God. And because we have been made in his relational image, **we're made for loving relationships**. We're created for community— with God and with each other.

And when you listen closely enough, don't the whispers, the pangs, the yearnings of your soul tell you that this is exactly the case? It doesn't matter whether you're an extrovert or an introvert. As one author expresses it:

The silent churning at the core of our being is the tormenting need to know and be known... to belong unconditionally and forever without fear of loss, betrayal or rejection... And now, wherever there is hope, our hope is for paradise regained, for... the redemptive restoration of community...<sup>9</sup>

There is both a beauty and a sadness to these words, isn't there?

Before the fall, Genesis tells us that the first human beings had been naked and unashamed. More than a matter of dress, this speaks of how they were fully free to be

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<sup>8</sup> See 1 John 4:16b

<sup>9</sup> Bilezekian, *Community 101*.

their authentic selves in relationship with God and each other. They were delightfully unselfconscious.

But in Genesis 3, once they had fallen into sin, it says:

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.<sup>10</sup>

Here we see that the very first consequences of humanity's fall into sin were relational. Human community, once innocent and perfect, is now disrupted. As the couple's eyes are opened, trust and authenticity dissolve, and for the first time ever, they feel shame. They feel the need to protect, to defend themselves. They cover up. They hide from each other, and they hide from God.

Don't we do that too? Do you ever cover up your true self? Do you ever hide from others and from God? Maybe sometimes, you even hide from yourself.

You see, the image of the relational God is still stamped upon us, but it's become distorted because of our sin. This is precisely why we find ourselves yearning for loving community, while at the same time trying to run and hide from it.

If you're watching live and can relate to what I've just described—if you yearn for community on the one hand, and yet resist it on the other— go ahead and type "I can relate" into the chat at this time.

Even in the church of Jesus Christ—where loving relationships should have the best chance of flourishing— the cultivation of community remains a constant challenge. It requires tremendous effort and intentionality. It's plenty of plain hard work and sacrifice, and quite frankly, it's risky.

And so, an obvious question arises: Is community worth pursuing?

The Bible's answer is yes, yes—a thousand times, yes. Why? Because God's dream has not changed, and you and I are made for God's dream. We're created for community.

Getting there will have its challenges, but God's dream of community will most certainly be realized. In fact, the closing chapters of the Bible paint this glorious picture of the end of time, after Jesus has returned to earth:

"Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will

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<sup>10</sup> Genesis 3:7-8 (NIV)

wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”<sup>11</sup>

This is a picture of God’s dream of community fully realized. This is where history is heading. If you choose to align your life with Jesus Christ, you’ll be in on God’s dream. Your soul’s hunger for perfect unbroken community will one day be completely and forever satisfied.

So both the opening and the closing chapters of the Bible—and so many hundreds of chapters in between— have God’s dream of loving community in view. God creates human beings in his own relational image, and through Jesus, he will ultimately redeem fallen human beings, fully restoring his relational image in us.

Our sins, which separated us from God and each other, were borne on the cross by Jesus, and when they were, our sins got in between Jesus and God the Father, separating them from each other for a time, so that Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”<sup>12</sup>

Can you even begin to fathom the infinite price God paid to save us from sin? Not only did Jesus suffer excruciating physical torture and die for us, but also, God sacrificed, for a time, the perfect, cherished unbroken oneness that the Father and the Son had forever enjoyed with each other so that in Christ you and I could be forgiven and restored into loving relationship—loving community— with God and also with each other.

There’s a lot more to come in this series as we continue to dig into what the Bible teaches about the priority of biblical community. But for now, allow me to close this message with a couple takeaways.

First, we want to encourage you to **connect with a small group** at Cornerstone the first chance you get. Our small groups are where we make space to live out the fact that we’ve been created for community. By God’s design, we need each other to grow in Jesus and to fulfill the mission he calls us to as a church. Our small groups are the key space where that happens here at Cornerstone.

We have over 30 small groups, and last week over 20 new people got connected into new small groups during our latest Group Launch event. But there are still many of you who aren’t part of a group yet.

So I’m excited to announce that in about a couple of months, we’ll start off the New Year with an **All-Church Small Group Campaign**. The whole church will go through an exciting sermon series together on Sundays, and then go deeper with the sermon material in small

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<sup>11</sup> Revelation 21:3b-4 (NIV)

<sup>12</sup> See Matthew 27:46

groups during the week. Those not already in groups will have the opportunity to get into a new group, whether we help place you in a group, or whether you just grab a few friends and start a group on your own.

So keep your eyes and ears open for the all-church small group campaign coming in January.

The second takeaway is to **make a “vow of stability.”** What does that mean? The term comes from the wisdom of ancient Christian monasteries, where monks would make a vow to stick with the same faith community for the long haul.

Why would such a commitment be important? Why would such a commitment be wise?

Well, when it comes to living in Christian community, Pastor Tim Keller hits the nail on the head when he says:

People are messy; therefore, relationships will be messy. Expect messiness.

When community life got hard, which it inevitably would, it could be very tempting for a monk to pick up and leave his faith community. The problem with that is, as St. Benedict put it some 1500 years ago:

When you run from community, you run from yourself.

When you run from community, you are running from the part within you that is contributing to the messiness. You want to get away from others because you don't want to face what's happening in you. And when that happens, you short-circuit your own growth in Christ.

Of course, there are times when God may legitimately call you out of one local church and into another. But our default posture needs to be one of stability—of sticking with the local congregation we're a part of—through thick and thin.

Because when your church relationships get messy, which they will, it's incredibly easy to transfer to the church down the street. Especially nowadays when we live in an era where the phenomenon of “church shopping” has become a thing.

But just like with our marriages and families—it's when we stay and work through the messiness that Jesus does his best work in and through us, shaping us in his humility and love in ways that could never happen otherwise. It's when we stay and work through the messiness that community—the kind of community we're created for— becomes truer, deeper, and richer.

So I would encourage you to take a moment of prayer, and in your own words, express to God a vow of stability—to say, ***Lord, by your grace, I will stick with this faith community through thick and through thin, until you should very clearly call me elsewhere.***



When we're that committed to community life, people who don't know Jesus yet will be drawn to him through the loving relationships we share with each other.

Make sure to be here for each Sunday of this series as we continue to dive deeper into the vital topic of biblical community in the weeks ahead. The Lord bless and keep you, Cornerstone family.