

Connected Leadership for Emerging Leaders: On Being Human

What does it mean to be fully human? This session will look into the biblical perspective of the Imago Dei, contrasting it with the surrounding world view. We will explore how distinctive leadership is exercised under Christ and in community.

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Introduction

This is the first session in a series looking at what it means to be fully human – and how this enables us to better understand who we are; what we are designed and called to do; and how we are to live. We can only hope to fully thrive and flourish when we put this understanding into practice.

This session will focus on growing this understanding of ourselves through placing us into God's big story. The bible can be seen as a series of unfolding movements, starting with Creation, a good world and everything in it is corrupted by the Fall. God does not leave us like this. His story continues to unfold and in Jesus we see the Fathers plan of Redemption realized. Jesus heralds God's kingdom and redemption through Jesus points on to the 'end' of the story – Restoration of all things under his Lordship.

We are going to use the Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration framework to better understand what it means to be fully human. Because of time we will spend more time on Creation than in the other three parts of the story. You will explore Fall, Redemption, and Restoration indirectly in more depth over the rest of this week.

Case study

You have a close friend who, on the surface, seems to be doing very well – s/he seems to be successful in their job, has lots of friends, and has a good home and family that are well cared for. But you know under the surface all is not as it seems.

Their role and work is not easy. There are bits of their job that your friends loves and that brings them great fulfillment and joy. But you know your friend also find much of their work difficult; it can be hard toil and full of challenges. There is also frustration, sometimes because there are so many opportunities to do good but so many tasks that require attention that takes them away from these opportunities. It is energy sapping and draining.

And it's not just work. Your friend is pulled in lots of different directions. The pressure of work has an impact on other areas of their life. They might be struggling at times to balance commitments to their family and in keeping up good deep friendships. They want to be strong and full of energy in every aspect of their life, but you know they are running on empty, and keeping up appearances is a strain. They want to give their best to every part of their life, but they have confided in you that they are often physically, emotionally and spiritually exhausted. Even holidays can be difficult as they feel pressure to have fun and come back to work fully energized. They have trouble finding refreshment and real joy.

Things cannot continue to go on like this without something changing or breaking in their life.

Questions for group discussion

- What happens if things do not change in your friends' life?
- What are the root cause of why your friend finds themselves struggling in secret? (Consider all the things described in the case study as the symptoms of deeper issues. What are they?)
- What do you think a good life for this person looks like?

Read Genesis 1,2+3

- i. What do we learn about ourselves/ humans in these chapters?
 - a. Our job description as humans? (What are we 'called' to do?)
 - b. What do we learn about how every person will flourish and find fulfillment?
 - c. What we can expect our experience of life to be like in light of chapter 3?
- ii. What do we learn about God in these chapters? Consider God's characteristics, His actions, and his expectations of us. In what ways do we/ can reflect God's image to the world around us?

A Framework to understand our place in God's big story

We trust the bible as God's word to reveal God's intentions and instructions for how we are to live well and understand ourselves.

Below is a framework that helps you work through what it means to live in light of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration. In relation to the case study we will focus on Creation for this session, but you might want to work through the other four sections in your own time.

Part 1: Creation

Apply this section to the case study. Think about what we learn in Creation about ourselves, God, and His Creation and how it might help you support offer wise advice assist and support to the friend described in the case study.

As you consider what we learn from the account of Creation consider what resources you, your friend and others will need to commit to making any changes.

1. Created as image-bearers

a. Stewards: authority and responsibility, but not ownership or sovereignty

God gives us a job to do which involves holding responsibility, but that is under His sovereignty. He gives us all of creation to care for and use fruitfully, but not to exploit it. How does this change how we hold our daily responsibilities and use what God has given us?

b. Relationships and community

The God who created us is Father, Son and Holy Spirit; unity in community. When Adam was created God saw it was not good for him to be alone. We are

created as relational beings and for relationship with both our Creator and with other image bearers. Our life is not a solo effort, but why does this matter or help? How are positive relationships being developed and sustained? What does this look like?

c. *Power: to give not to grab, to empower not diminish*

God is the source of all power but we see God giving His power away so that His creation can multiply, grow, teem, and flourish. Power is not something to be held onto or for us to grab from others so we can 'rule' over them. How does God's use of power help liberate our desires and aspirations? Are you/ your friend being *empowered*? How and by whom?

d. *Work: creating, cultivating, worship, and service*

We are created to work. Genesis 1+2 uses two different words for work. Melaka and Avodah. The first relates to work of a craftsman that brings a sense of fulfillment. The other word used for work is also used for service or worship. How does this transform our understanding of what work is and should be?

e. *Rest: an act of trust*

We are commanded to rest. God gives us a good pattern for how we are to live and this has rest as an integral part of it. Why do we find it hard to rest and stop? What does 'rest' or shalom mean and how does it compare to how the world thinks of rest? How will we implement true Sabbath?

Part 2: Fall, Redemption, Restoration

We will not have time to go through these three parts in detail but if you have time in your group you might want to work through these points below quickly, reflecting on how they might impact your discussion focused on Creation.

2. Living in light of the Fall

- a. Expecting frustration / Learning to persevere
- b. Contending with our sinful desires - the Discipline of Discipline
- c. Relationships - loving the unlovable other

3. Living in response to redemption

- a. A new paradigm for measuring success: faithful presence
- b. Loving God, Loving our neighbour: service and sacrifice
- c. Thanksgiving and worship: Appreciating God's good gifts
- d. Changed by grace

4. Looking forward to our Restoration

Certain hope: brokenness healed

Legacy: the wealth of the nations brought into the New Jerusalem

Bringing things together

We will struggle if we do not know the story we are in and the role we have in that story. The bible locates us in God's big story and explains who, why, and where we are in that story. It is important that we understand this big story (the Christian world view) and why it is good news (gospel). The world around us and the culture we find ourselves living in is likely to have a different worldview and gospel. We need to understand not only what we think but what our neighbours think to know where the points of connection and conflict may be.

If our strategy is faithfulness to God and locating ourselves in His story we need to work out the tactics of how we keep ourselves spiritually healthy and mature. Creation helps us points to some key elements of how we do this and what we need to invest in:

- Relationships (we are created for relationship with our Creator and one another; where are our relationships of accountability and discipleship)
- Service (worshiping God (including through our work), caring for His creation, loving our neighbour)
- Sabbath (trusting God; remembering His goodness, promises and actions; an act of rebellion that I am not in control)

John Stott noted the marks of Christian Leadership will be clear vision, hard work, dogged perseverance, humble service, and iron discipline (including 'to wait on God'). But they will also "repent of two particularly horrid sins", pessimism and mediocrity. Our understanding of Creation, and more fully Fall, Redemption, and Restoration help us grow in each of these areas.

Prayer

We capture a vision of what it means to be in God's big story and Created in his image (Gen 1:27)

That we will put on our new selves as those made in the Creator's image (Col 3:10)

To look to Jesus as the perfect representation of what it is to be an image bearer (Heb 1:3)

To trust in His grace and hold onto the hope that our broken and marred image will be one day fully restored (2 Cor 12:9-10)