

South Bay Community Church
Sermon Reflections
Life Reimagined
3 & 4 September 2022
Lead Pastor Tammy Long

Scripture Texts: Genesis 1:26-28, 31

Sermon Preamble

We were created for a good, beautiful, and exceedingly abundant life as stewards in God's Kingdom. In our quiet lives of desperation, we may miss the abundant joy and beautiful life God offers. God invites every person into partnership as a steward in the Kingdom of God, with a life of abundance and joy. God can be trusted not only to have our best interest at heart, but also wants to offer the very best life imaginable. It doesn't take much to remind us how short and how precious life really is. Each day is a gift to be cherished, enjoyed, and celebrated. Yet days come and go with little notice. Distracted by day-to-day details, we miss moments to love, to share, to encourage, and to worship. Are we living our lives the way we really want to live in the fullest way that God intended? God is inviting us to a life reimagined.

The Quiet Desperation of Thoreau and like many of us

Henry David Thoreau withdrew for two years from day-to-day life to conduct an experiment to extract the meaning of life. In his classic book titled *Walden* about his experiences, he wrote: "The mass of men (and women) lead lives of quiet desperation." So many of us, if not all of us, are seeking desperately and quietly things like joy, significance, peace, purpose, love, meaning, security, an overall sense of wellness mentally, physically, emotionally, or spiritually. Some of us do not like the quiet of being alone or looking closely inward because then discontent rises to the surface. We become aware of something that is not what we'd like it to be. We come face to face with ourselves and realize that something is missing. It is good to become self-aware, but we don't always know what to do with the discontent that can bubble up. For our desperation, we may ignore it, hide it, or seek to silence it with various habits. Some have learned to take these feelings to God in prayer. We go on living our lives as best we can and may simply push that quiet desperation underground.

Response to God's invitation to Life Reimagined

What if there is another way of being, doing, and thinking about our lives in response to that quiet desperation? God has a different vision for how to manage our reality. God is inviting us to a life reimagined. God has a plan for those areas in our lives that are not what they should be, could be, or that we'd like them to be. Even if your life is super wonderful right now with no hint of discontent or quiet desperation, don't you want to experience the good, beautiful, and abundant life God has imagined for you? Are we wanting to live our very best life of all God has for us? We can then grow and live to the fullest for God. We want God's vision for our lives and want to reimagine our life through the eyes of God.

Back to the Beginning of Humanity to Reimagine Our Lives through the Lenses of God

We have to go back to the very beginning to recalibrate, deconstruct, and reconstruct what we have picked up on the road of life. Let's go back to the origin of humanity so that we can remember who we are, whose we are, and why we are truly here in the first place. Then we can reimagine our lives through those lenses. Hear the Word of God from Genesis 1:26-28, 31.²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground."²⁷ So God created human beings in his own image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.²⁸ Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill

the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.”²⁹ Then God said, “Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food.³⁰ And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—everything that has life.” And that is what happened.³¹ Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!

This backstory of God’s intention for a life reimagined informs us big picture, who we are, why we are here, and what we are supposed to be doing with our lives. You may have heard this scripture many times. We invite you into the story a little deeper, with a multi-sensory experience, fresh eyes, ears, and viewpoint, witnessing a replay of this incredible new birth God is doing. Let’s envision the backstory of humanity’s origin like you were there.

The Beauty that Transpired during those Periods of Time

Think about all that transpired in those days or periods of time. Whether you take the Genesis account literally, metaphorically, or poetically, the beauty and awe of creation is undisputed. Genesis was never meant to be a science book; that is not the discussion or focus. Science can help with when and how, but faith tells us who and why. Science and faith do not have to be at odds, but that is another sermon for another day.

Genesis gives us the setting for the birth of humanity. Genesis gives us the setting for the birth of humanity with a fresh and beautiful world, vibrant and luscious vegetation, animals of all kinds of shapes and sizes peacefully co-existing, grandiose mountains kissing the heavens, and sparkling blue seas swarming with all kinds of life. It was so amazingly beautiful, captivating, and breathtaking, that even God said, “This is good!”

God Creates Humans in God’s Image

Humans are unique, unlike anything else God had created thus far. Whether you take Genesis literally, metaphorically, or poetically, the undisputed fact and truth is that humanity exists. Genesis 1:26 reveals God made humans in God’s image. Thoughts of what it means to be made in the image of God include that humans have a soul, humans have the capacity to respond to God, humans have the ability to reason, humans have the ability to create, and humans have the ability to empathize. These examples are probably only scratching the surface of comprehending the mystery that we are made in the image of God.

That is why every person is worthy of respect and dignity. Each human being an image bearer of God means automatic value and esteem. We can know God as each of us reflects the image of God.

Let’s consider the context of scripture, “Then God said, ‘Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us’ (Genesis 1: 26a). The next thing God mentions is the role humans are to have in God’s creation. “They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky....” (Genesis 1:26b). A key aspect of being made in God’s image relates to having authority, management, and leadership over creation. In that moment, to be made in God’s image, as we are made in God’s image, includes reigning over what God has made.

God Blesses Humanity

“God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. Then God blessed them....” (Genesis 1:27-28). God blessing them is an important detail because it speaks to what is happening and God’s intention. God took the time right then to bless and to express God’s favor; the blessing was important. Through this blessing, God is affirming his vision for humanity to have a good future with positive possibilities and experiences. Through this blessing, God is bestowing and confirming God’s desire and intention for humanity to have a good, beautiful and abundant life; for that is what a blessing is.

God's Charge to Humans with the Blessing: Be Fruitful and Multiply for Abundant Living

"Then God blessed them and said, 'Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.'" (Genesis 1:28). God's charge to them was to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and govern it, and to reign over creation. This scene is a highly joyous and exciting moment. God created this awesome, beautiful world. Every phase was good with all its treasures, discoveries, and magnificence. Then God created humanity, made in God's image to enjoy God's creation and take care of it all. God gave humanity full authority, leadership, and administrative governance to keep it going and even expand on it. The word in the original language for Eden relates to the word meaning to enrich and make abundant. The place God put the original humans was a garden of abundance.

God told them to be fruitful and multiply. This charge is much more encompassing than procreation of children. For example, we are fruitful and fill the earth with music, art, literature, scientific exploration, human kindness and care, and all kinds of ideas and thoughts that broaden our horizons and make the world a better place. To be fruitful simply means to flourish and produce in abundance. To multiply is to increase in number, quantity, and to expand. Similar to fruitfulness, there are many ways to multiply. To be fruitful and multiply in all of its facets is the life God imagined for us; it is part of living an abundant life. As we consider our lives reimagined, in what ways are we being fruitful, multiplying, and thereby experiencing abundant living? Just like Adam and Eve, we have been made in God's image. We have been given authority and responsibility to manage this world and everything in it including ourselves for a good, beautiful, and abundant life.

God is calling humanity to be stewards

Imagine the senior members of a family developed and built up a company into a thriving business. The business is running smoothly with strong finances. The Senior Member wants the children to run this business for the family. The senior members of the family declare that the children can take care of it, develop it, grow it, and enjoy it. The children were made for this!

That is essentially what God is doing here. God is inviting humanity to join Him in the business of the family of God. God is entrusting creation into their hands. God is not abdicating or walking away. God is appointing them and trusting them to be caretakers for God.

To use another word we often hear in church, God is charging them to be stewards. A steward simply means one who has been entrusted with authority and responsibility to manage something for someone else. At first, that may sound like a servant, but a steward in the Kingdom of God is very different. It is a role of trust and partnership. It is a role God designed for our good and enjoyment. It is a blessing, a privilege, and a gift. It is how we fit in the world and what God imagined for us- not as servants, but as friends and partners with God. We have the joy of God's presence and all that God has made, doing our part in gratefulness to be fruitful, multiply, and care for all God has given us.

It is not that we have to be stewards; rather it is the privilege that we get to be stewards.

Think of our illustration of the invitation to children to join the family business. Some sons and daughters reject the call to stewardship. They want nothing to do with the family business, and they cannot get away fast enough. That is their choice, as disappointing it may be for their parents. Another son or daughter has watched what their parents built and has the same passion, desire, and vision for the business that the parents have. Think of the son or daughter, who, like the born again Christian, responds with delight to the invitation from their parent of stewardship of the family business.

Their eyes get big; their heart starts racing. They are so joyful that their parent trusts them and invites them into the family business. It is not a chore or a burden; it is what they want to do, what they get to do, and what they were born to do. They want to do a really good job. They want to make their parents pleased and proud. They will do whatever it takes to do it well and to the best of their abilities. The result is joining with their parents in shared love.

That is what God offered Adam and Eve, and that is the invitation God offers us today. It is a loving partnership with God as stewards of the Kingdom of God for the good, beautiful, and abundant life for the glory of God.

Steward in the Kingdom of God applies to every aspect of our lives

Being a steward in the Kingdom of God applies to every aspect of our lives. Over the coming weeks, we will reimagine through God's eyes what it means to manage or steward our mission, our purpose, our finances, our bodies, our influence, our earth, our relationships, and our resources. It all belongs to God, and God already has a vision for every aspect of our lives. That vision is according to what God knows is best, according to what God has already established and put in motion for us, according to God's promises, and according to God's provision.

God prepares everything we need to be stewards

God has already supplied everything we need or has a plan to provide what we need according to God's purposes. "Then God said, 'Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food.³⁰ And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—everything that has life.' And that is what happened" (Genesis 1:29-30). Even after God entrusted Adam and Eve to be fruitful, multiply, govern, and manage creation, God wanted them to know they had everything they need to do that. God promised to provide. For us, the same is true; God promises to provide.

When we say yes to God as stewards in the Kingdom of God, we are then able to experience all God has imagined for us. Life reimagined is the good, beautiful, and abundant life that is the remedy and antidote for that quiet desperation Henry David Thoreau wrote about. In the coming weeks, we will unpack all that means.

Definition of Stewardship

So often, stewardship is connected with money. As we have seen with the original stewards of Adam and Eve, stewardship applies to every aspect of life. Our framework as we look at life reimagined defines stewardship. Stewardship is **trusting in the promises of God, to deploy the resources of God, to accomplish the mission of God, for the glory of God**. When we do stewardship, God promises a good, beautiful, and abundant life. It is the way God created our life to be, and we are invited to join with God.

Did the sin and fall of Adam and Eve change the call to stewardship for a life reimagined?

Adam and Eve did make a choice that cost them the intimate relationship and partnership they experienced with God. The Fall did cause a break with creation. What was designed to be joyous stewardship and care for creation became hard work and toil. The Fall did cause disconnects in humanity with brother and brother and family strife. It did cause disconnects with one's self, one's purpose, and one's peace. The Fall is where the quiet desperation Thoreau wrote about comes from.

However, sin did not change God's vision for humanity. True to God's promises and provision, God already had a plan for what God knew Adam and Eve would do. We are still born to be stewards, and we are invited to be stewards of the Kingdom of God. "¹⁵ I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me.¹⁶ You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name" (John 15:15-16). Jesus extends the same invitation for us to join him as friends and as stewards in the family business.

Jesus restores us from the brokenness of sin, and he offers us the same good, beautiful, and abundant life God envisioned from the beginning of time.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Sermon Preamble

How are you distracted by the day-to-day details of living your life to the fullest the way God intended for your life? What steps can you take to reimagine the life that God offers you?

The Quiet Desperation of Thoreau like many of us

What are you seeking in life that is elusive and out of reach for you?

When you look closely inward at yourself as you are alone and quiet, what makes you feel discontentment? What is the something that is missing?

What has been your reaction to the discontent that can bubble up? When do you ignore the discontent?

When do you hide the discontent? When do you seek to silence the discontent? Even when you take your feelings to God in prayer, what struggles may remain from your quiet desperation?

Response to God's invitation to Life Reimagined

How can it help you, when you feel quiet desperation, to experience the abundant life God has imagined for you from reimagining your life as inspired by the abundant life as stewards in the Kingdom of God?

Back to the Beginning of Humanity to Reimagine Our Lives through the Lenses of God

When you imagine that you were there at the period of time as God created humanity as revealed to us in Genesis 1:26-31, what would you see, hear, and feel as a witness to the creation of humanity and the awesome beauty of this world?

The Beauty that Transpired during those Periods of Time

The word in the original language translated "day" is often used to refer to an undefined period of time, not a 24 hour period. Regardless the length of that period of time, the beauty and awe of creation is undisputed. What do you see through the eyes of God about the setting God created for humanity, so beautiful and awesome that God said, "This is good!"?

God Creates Humans in God's Image

What does it mean to you that humanity is created in the image of God? How does it impact your view of self, your actions horizontally with other human beings, and your responsibility in relationship to the rest of God's creations?

God Blesses Humanity

What is the importance that at creation, God blessed humanity both male and female? What does the blessing declare about God's plan and intention for humanity?

God's Charge to Humans with the Blessing: Be Fruitful and Multiply for Abundant Living

After God blessed humanity, God gave humanity the charge to be fruitful and multiply. What are various ways that we can be fruitful and multiply beyond procreation of children? As we are fruitful and multiply, how is this experiencing abundant living as seen through the lenses of God?

God is calling humanity to be stewards

We are adopted sons and daughters of God in the family business as stewards of the Kingdom of God. How do you feel when God calls you into a loving partnership with God as stewards of the Kingdom of God for the good, beautiful, and abundant life for the glory of God?

Steward in the Kingdom of God applies to every aspect of our lives

In what specific areas besides money does God ask us to manage as a steward on behalf of God as the owner in accordance with the vision and plan of God?

God prepares everything we need to be stewards

Why is it important that God's promises to provide everything we need as stewards for God's purposes?

Definition of Stewardship

What is the definition of stewardship we will using as a framework as we study a life reimagined?

Did the sin and fall of Adam and Eve change the call to stewardship for a life reimagined?

What was the cost to Adam and Eve of their choice to sin? Why did sin not eliminate God's plan for a loving partnership with humanity to be stewards in the Kingdom of God?