

# THE STORY OF HUMANITY

## THE COMPLEXITIES OF CREATION

**03 OCTOBER - 06 NOVEMBER 2021**

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### THE BELOVED HUMANITY

(31 OCT - 06 NOV 2021)

#### INTRODUCTION

The story of humanity at its core is founded in the relentless love of God. This love loves us long before we could know anything of it. This love loves us long after we have long ignored it and brushed it off. It is the love that John Wesley calls Prevenient Grace. Such love is not dependent on us, but on the choice God has made in God's heart without us doing anything to ask for it. At times we cry out for it and there are moments we absolutely do not care about it at all, but God loves us regardless. Philip Yancey points out that, "*Grace means that there is nothing we can do to make God love us more. And grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us less.*" This means that love is a gift and not a reward. It is a blessing and not a stamp of approval. We do not have to prove ourselves first before God can love us. Yes, we can respond to such love out of gratitude and praise. As we do this such love forms us to becoming more and more of the people God has created us to be. This love awakens within us a deep sense of knowing our true potential in also loving if we are made by love. We learn to love God as we grow in loving one another, so that we can be the beloved – the loved, chosen and sent ones.



**Gifted with Life** – From the onset, humanity has received the gift they have never deserved. The intention with which God created is a gift to humanity. Humanity was not created because there needed to be separation from anything else.



Light was a separation from darkness. Dry land was a separation from the waters. Green plants were a separation from ineptitude and incapacity. When God created in Gen 1:26, God said, "And now we will make human beings." The "And now" is an important phrase that is said when there is satisfaction that all conditions are ripe for the next phase. It is an intentional phrase that points to the ultimate. It is a statement of arrival at a desired point. God has reached the desired point of displaying God's love for creation by placing within creation God's everlasting image – as gift to creation.

God also showed the same sense in the Genesis 2 creation story. God intentionally gives life to humanity by breathing into their nostrils. Life therefore is a gift from God. We must wake up to this gift as God woke us to it in our slumber by breathing into us the awakening spirit. Even in other moments when humanity has woken up, humanity has seen life never like before. Adam woke up to this life of partnership, fellowship and companionship with a hymn of affirmation (Gen 2:23). Jacob wakes up from his nightmare of losing everything to Laban to a perfect plan of building wealth (Gen 31:10-13). Jacob also wakes up in Gen 32:22-32 with a blessing that makes him to praise God and declare that the place where he saw God face to face shall be called Peniel. He was gifted with life even though his hip was put out of the socket, he limped on. At times wrestling with God can be incapacitating, and yet, God gives us the strength to take the next step. We have a gift of life from God.

Even as we perish, God has a way of preserving us as God did through Noah. It may not be our entire lives that get to be saved all at once, but the part of who we are that has been spared, can give rise to more life. Pairs went into the ark and that saved creation.

## REFLECTION

***How have you sensed the gift of life from God?***

**Blessed with Forgiveness** – Picking up the story of humanity from Genesis 33 is a heart moving moment of how Esau behaves in a manner that defies what Jacob deserves. Sin makes us to feel less of who we are. Guilt can drive us to the bottomless pit of nothingness. Jacob has been running from Esau not only for his life, but all that belonged to him and his family's life. He plans to appease his brother Esau with gifts that would entice Esau. To his surprise Esau pays no attention to that, except his relationship with his brother. No gift ever mattered to Esau, except to find his brother and show him his love, even though Jacob had failed to do so.

Seemingly then the best moment for us to love is when there is no reason for us to love. We do not even learn this from God at this instance, but from another human being.

With all the bad things that humanity is capable of doing, humanity is also capable of doing that which God is able to do – love without condition. Being at peace when all that we have done calls for wrath. We too are able to embrace



when we had faced rejection. When we are able to do these things, we discover that we are able to forgive. We are able to offer peace as a gift – a gift that builds bridges and restores humanity within us. Forgiveness therefore is the ability to '**For(e-)Give**' – to **give before** as Esau came to his brother in peace, but also with peace as a gift.

## REFLECTION

***How do you feel about giving the gift of peace to those who have wronged you? Who has ever forgiven you even when you were struggling to forgive yourself? How did this make you feel?***

**Blessed with God's People** – There are many people that God puts on the same path as us whom if we pay attention to they are such a blessing to us. The twists and turns in Gen 14:17-24 point us to the fact that people are not the same. Some come to us with good intentions and yet some come to us with bad intentions. Abram has come from war and has been victorious. The king of Sodom goes to meet him. Before setting out another king, Melchizedek came to him with gifts and a blessing. He did not bring much, bread and wine. Simple and ordinary gifts were brought by the king who also was the priest of the High God. It is possible to serve God wherever we are. We can learn from others that the service of the Lord is not in specific places, but wherever we are. So, the simple gifts were brought to Abram accompanied by an invaluable gift – a blessing, a well wish this time. Simple and yet powerful words that instill confidence in Abram.

The story of humanity has disturbing decisions we make and it is only due to the people God puts in our lives that we are reminded of our humanity. The so-called father of our faith Abraham in Gen 20 shows us how even the best can sin. Abraham gives his wife to another man as security for his safety. Abraham had stooped very low. It is Abimelech who reminds Abraham of his sinfulness and the disaster he almost brought to him and his people. Abimelech was so kind even to the point of giving up his land to Abraham. He also gave money to Abraham. Abimelech remained a good person to Abraham in Genesis 21: 22-34. Did Abraham question this generosity, no! Can this point us to some insights about our potential to being perpetrators of injustice by us not saying no to actions that leave others poorer. At times injustice is us not doing something when we could have. Even with that though God still uses us as God did with Abraham. The next Chapter is Isaac being born – God is just amazing.




## REFLECTION

***Who are some of the people God has given you who have helped you to grow in your life?***

**Blessed with Conscience** – One of the gifts human beings have is the Conscience. It is the ability to realize the harm caused or that can be caused. With this gift we are able to exercise self-control and not be perpetrators of harmful life. It gives us the ability to be remorseful and acknowledge the wrongs we have done. The Old Testament people used this gift at times and won God's favour again. We don't see much of this in the Book of Genesis, but as the prophets come into the picture God reminds us of this gift from time to time. Jonah even complained about when he did not want to go to Nineveh as he had discovered what God's Word is able to do (Jonah 3) – bring people to repentance, awakening their conscience to the grace of God.



Conscience is the light by which we interpret the will of God in our own lives.

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~ Thomas Merton

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It is God who gives this gift. Isaiah 30:21 tells of how God guides God's people. "And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left." Why

would God be concerned about each step we take? Every step takes us somewhere. Most steps take us away from God. It becomes important for God therefore to always guide us so that we don't walk astray. The more we listen to God, the more we become aware of God's ways. Conscience therefore is a gift of paying attention to God. That is why the Psalmist in Psalm 16:7 says, "I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also, my heart instructs me." It is this conscience that will make us together with the Psalter to say, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." The gift of conscience helps us to long to do that which pleases God.

## REFLECTION

*How has God woken up your conscience?*

## **CONCLUSION**

We are not alone in a world that calls for privacy as a virtue. We live by the principles, "Mind your own business." This is never the case with God. God's people are not left alone, neither do they ascribe then to ideologies of secluded lives from God and one another. God's people are blessed with people who will love them as God loves us. We are loved before we could know anything of this love. Life is what God gives us at any given moment of our encounter with God. This gift of life opens our lives to the abundance of this gift. The more we allow God to stay close to us so that in our moments of snoozing, God wakes us up to see how incomplete we are without God. God also uses people for us to see this gift. As we embrace God's people, we realize the beauty of life. We see the gift that others are to us as they guide us. At times this guidance is in the most uncomfortable of ways. It exposes our human condition. We become aware of the things we have done that we were not supposed to do. Even the best people have had to be woken up to their unhelpful past as Abimelech did with Abraham. He too at times had to be reminded as Isaac would later remind him of what he too is capable of in Genesis 26:16-33.

God does not leave us alone, but continuously guides us in all our ways. We may think God is being harsh and yet, God is being gracious as God saves us from the worst we can become and the danger of losing life. God would use the prophets like Jonah, Isaiah, Jeremiah to awaken our conscience and help us to repent. This interaction gives us a fresh start to life. We begin to see life with different eyes and the role we can play in making life better for all of us.

The story of humanity is laced with goodness as at its core the same goodness resides. We just need to pay attention to it, and we would realize that ours is a story of love and life.

# REFLECTION TIME

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## PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. What has been the very thing that has pointed you to the gift of life?
2. How have you learned to embrace this gift of life?
3. Who are the people who have helped in reminding you about this gift?
4. How have you allowed God to use you to remind others about this gift of life?
5. Looking back at your life, what was your first encounter with the presence of God? Where were you when this happened?
6. How can you map out your journey from the time you became aware of God to where you are today?
7. Where could God be still taking you?

## GROUP REFLECTION

1. What is the importance of remembering life as a gift from God?
2. Why do we at times think that we are self-made? Is there such a thing to begin with – of being self-made?
3. Why do people struggle to allow others to guide them? Why is it important to begin with for us to be guided by others?
4. Thinking of conscience, what is it? What does it help with?
5. Why is it important for us to look back and remember our mistakes? Is it a helpful journey or not?
6. What value can we discover in allowing God to guide us?
7. How best can we allow God to guide us in our lives?