

THE STORY OF HUMANITY

THE COMPLEXITIES OF CREATION

03 OCTOBER - 06 NOVEMBER 2021

THE RELATIONAL HUMANITY

(17-23 OCT 2021)

INTRODUCTION

From the time God created human beings, they were never meant to live solitary lives. God has always wanted to share a deep relationship with humanity. Some of God's effort would soon be dealt a terrible blow by humanity. God tries to have the human beings relate well with the rest of creation, but instead human beings see themselves as above all. Human beings would even struggle to have meaningful relationships with one another. Terrible things would as a consequence befall humanity like the floods, scattering all over the world with confused languages. Later we will learn of the wars they would start against each other. These wars and struggle still continue to this day.



The Eden Moments – The relationship God had with humanity began with



blessings beyond measure. Humanity had everything prepared for them without any effort from their side. Eden was to be a place of bliss. Humanity was meant to enjoy life in its fullness. There was no need to worry about tomorrow – the future had been taken care of. God had provided it all for humanity. God's providence for humanity was to be eternal. Humanity failed to see this and fully appreciate it. The lack of wisdom to discern what is best got in the way of humanity enjoying the blessings God had in store for them.

What was supposed to be enjoyment soon turned out to be endurance. Humanity would now have to leave all that beauty of the Eden and set out for a life they had not prepared themselves for and God had not prepared them for. When we do not appreciate the goodness of God, we soon find ourselves thrown in the deep end to fend for ourselves. It is a reality that awaits all of us if we lack discernment of what is best for us not only now, but for the future as well.

This lack of discernment breaks relationships as we see the relationship between God and humanity suffers hugely. God has had to set boundaries that were never there in the beginning (Gen 3:24). Not only life would be difficult, but also complicated. At times our choices in life complicates things for us and others too.

REFLECTION

***What choices have you made in life that have complicated your life?
How have you managed to cope with these complications?***

Envy – Some of the deep seated desires need to be kept in check. We can easily lose the balance between feeling good about ourselves and feeling good about others at the same time. This happens when we think that all the good things need to happen to us and only us.

We begin to feel others are getting in the way of our blessings. We soon develop hatred for them. This was the case with Cain over Abel. Cain failed to learn from his brother Abel the importance of



giving the best to God. Instead, he held a grudge against his brother to the point of killing him. It is often a dangerous thing to start looking at people as stumbling blocks. It makes us feel very unhappy and we lose sense of relating well with them. It happens at work, school, sports and even in Church. The elimination of the opponent may not always be physical, but emotional and psychological. We can easily dent someone's character in order to get things our way. We lose sight of the added value we all bring to enable life. There are greater lessons Cain could have learnt from Abel. He missed an opportunity for him to grow in generosity and worshipping God. In the end, he would lose the relationship with self and live in fear of others. His envy would leave him even poorer inside. Our unhappiness with others can easily leave us unhappy with our own lives. Relationships mean that we are not the same and are able to learn from others so that we can grow and become better people.

REFLECTION

In what areas do you need to grow? Who are the people who can help you to grow that you need to embrace rather than push away?

Self-destruction – One of the most difficult problems humanity needs to come to terms with is the ability to self-destroy. At times this happens over time and yet there are times it happens so rapidly that the destruction is irreversible. The words we speak, the things we do can lead to self-destruction. The story of Noah and the flood in Gen 6 points out to how we cannot lose the things we have had, but we also lose our lives when we choose to stand against God. Indeed, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." (Prov 9:10). This fear is not terror, fright or apprehension, but the reverence, admiration and respect for God and God's values. We would find that if we were to uphold this kind of living, our lives would be spared.



The biggest problem with self-destruction is that there will always be unintended consequences. The eradication of bad people leads to the death of innocent creation. Personal sin can lead to corporate consequences. Our lives do not stand in isolation of others and the rest of creation. What we do as individuals has a direct impact on how others experience life. Self-destruction results in environmental destruction. Environmental this time in terms of all that surrounds us. People get

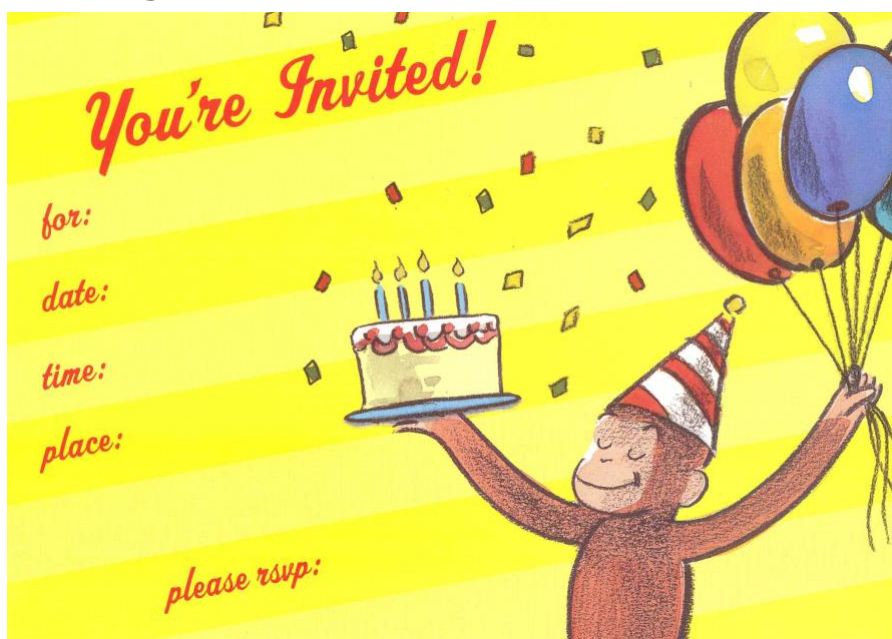
hurt; creation suffers with the effects of our sinfulness being felt beyond just the individuals.

REFLECTION

How have your actions affected others? How have you stood against God, even on those aspects that you would think are insignificant and yet if you look back they have had an impact on others?

The Great Invitation – With all that the human beings have done that has not pleased God, God continues to look at the human beings with capable eyes. God chooses not to fulfill God’s vision and plan without the human beings getting involved. The potential people have had in Gen 11:1-9 that has not pleased God and their energy focusing on self and proving how capable they are without God does not deter God from calling on some people to advance God’s plan and will. This plan unfolds over a number of centuries. People would have thought God had forgotten about them. God is patient with us, and God’s plan cannot be interfered with. God had declared in the beginning that human beings would be in God’s image, in God’s likeness. Such a declaration would

not be nullified by our lack of wisdom and faithfulness. Abram gets to be born. Things change to favour humanity again. The



sending in Gen 12:1 is different from that of Gen 3:23 and Gen 4:12. This is not a sending of consequences, but of God’s unfolding plan. At times when God invites us, God sets us on a journey we have never embarked on. It feels foreign. It requires faith – this deep trust in God to take God at His word. Just as people left the Garden of Eden and headed for a life they have never experienced or Cain leaving his family, and yet God was still with them; why would God abandon those whom God’s call is sending them for the fulfilment of God’s plan?

This plan is futuristic. The future tense is important for us to note, "I will" in Gen 12:1-3 is what gave Abram assurance. God is not saying *I may*, but *'I will'*. God will not turn back on the promise God has made. It may take patience from Abram as the promise is not going to be fulfilled here and now. It is going to be a journey, but in end it will be. Only in Chapter 21, eight full Chapters does Isaac get to be born. This is after a long wait and struggle with Abram questioning God as God keeps on making promises to Abram like in Gen 15. Faith seemingly is not the absence of doubt, but the ability to trust when doubt kicks in. Sarai also struggles together with Abram and convinces Abram to move on and have children with Hagar in Chapter 16. Even Abram struggled with God and yet God continued to keep the promises God had made.

REFLECTION

When and how have you doubted God in your life? How have you managed to overcome this, or if still struggling what are you doing to keep your faith strong in the Lord? What has been your temptation to want to move on? How can you resist this?

CONCLUSION

Although humanity may disappoint God, God remains faithful. God does this even by keeping on standing together with humanity, even if the consequences of the human beings' actions break God's heart and they have to be allowed by God to lead the lives they have chosen – not being directed by God. We lack wisdom at times to see the bigger picture and get to be distracted by other things. God on the other hand looks at us with grace and relentless love. When we struggle with self, God is there for us. We may not listen to God like Cain, but God would have offered us guidance. We may not respect that which God loves, but God continues to show us love that we do not deserve. We stumble and fall and we bring others down together with us as they are confronted with the realities of the choices we have made. Our

choices in life affect in the innocent and they too have to live with the harsh realities of the choices we have made. In all of this God remains good to us.

God will even go to the extent of inviting us to be part of God's grand plan. We may struggle to grasp this plan, but God goes ahead with it. If needs be, God will remind us repeatedly of God's commitment to us. We may look out for easy ways of fast-tracking God's plan in our way, but God remains true to God's word. Perhaps we struggle because we are not the architects of the plan, but this does not mean we cannot be made part of it. We may mess up, like the Tapestry Master who allows novices to weave and when he sees a mistake incorporates it into the beauty of the tapestry, God keeps on doing wonders even with our mistakes as God does with Abram and Sarai. Ishmael is now part of God's grand plan. The Tapestry Master does not discard the spoilt tapestry, but does adjustments to ensure the grand plan is not destroyed.

REFLECTION TIME

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. What have been your best moments in life?
2. What have been your worst moments in life?
3. What lessons have you learnt from both these moments?
4. How have you been influenced in a manner that is not pleasing to God?
How would you avoid the same from happening going forward?
5. Why has it been difficult for you to fully trust God with your life and your future?
6. How have you taken things into your hands instead of trusting God?
7. How have you experienced the love and faithfulness of God in your personal life?

GROUP REFLECTION

1. Why is it easy for people to hide instead of coming out clean on what they have done?
2. What are the dangers of not listening to God at all times?
3. Why are the less important things in life having so much influence in our lives?
4. How can people try and remain faithful to God?
5. Living in a world of instant results and easy to measure outcomes, why is important to be patient with God?
6. We like to be in control of our own destiny. How do you think this affects our readiness to be sent by God?
7. In a world that searches for the presence of God in our lives, what are some of the helpful ways that could make us stop and allow God to reveal God's presence in us?