

DISCIPLESHIP - THE STORY

CHAPTER 1 – At the Beginning: The Gift of Life

February 8th, 2023

1 Love always creates.

- God lovingly creates.
 - **1 John 4:7–8 (ESV)** — **7** Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. **8** Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

 - **Genesis 1:1–3 (ESV)** — **1** In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. **2** The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. **3** And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.
 - See also **John 1:1–5 (ESV)**.

- Ponder this: because there was a beginning, what came before creation? What has God been doing?
 - To understand our story, we must put our story in the bigger story.

- As much as it is true, “love always creates,” it is also true that fear destroys.
 - **Read 1 John 4:18–21 (ESV)**.

 - **1 Corinthians 13:4–8 (ESV)** — **4** Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant **5** or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; **6** it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. **7** Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. **8** Love never ends.
 - If this is what love looks like, how is that a commentary on God and how we as believers should be motivated?

- Jesus sets the record straight.
 - **John 3:16–17 (ESV)** — **16** “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

 - **Mark 1:14–15 (ESV)** — **14** Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, **15** and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

PONDERING LIFE: How does this principle, that “love always creates,” reveal some solutions to the problems we see in our world, today?

2 **Knowing that humanity would fall, why set up this story to unfold the way it did?**

- Love is real only in the midst of free-will, where there is choice between good and evil.

- God's love gave us a mission of creative love.
 - **Genesis 1:27–28 (ESV) — 27** So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. **28** And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”
 - You are an imager of God!

 - The mission creates a choice to love or to destroy.

 - The mission introduces a continual potential dilemma—will we lovingly create like God or reject our responsibility to the one who gave us life?

- An Analogy: The Problem of Robots

3 **Adam and Eve are given the gift of life and free-will under God's reign and care. What did they do with it?**

- **Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-24**

- When we're given a choice, free will is released to define our lives under the loving reign of God.

- The Enemy's strategy from the beginning has been to seduce you into questioning God's goodness. (**Gen. 3:1-5**)

- In their free-will state, Adam and Eve chose that self-rule apart from God's wisdom was better. (**Gen. 3:6-7**)

PONDERING LIFE: How have you seen the enemy's strategy of questioning God's goodness working to deceive you?

4 **Adam and Eve not only lost access to the Garden; they also lost access to the *Presence of God* and the *Tree of Life*.**

- The life we all know we're supposed to have exists only where ETERNITY and the PRESENCE OF GOD dwells.

- The Power of Sin (**Matthew 1:21; Luke 24:46-47; Romans 3:9-12; 3:23; 5:12; 6:23; 1 Corinthians 15:56; Galatians 5:17-21; Ephesians 6:12; Hebrews 1:1-3, 9:27-28, 10:12-14; James 1:14-15**)
 - Sin separates.
 - Sin interferes with the life-giving design and principles of God.
 - Sin agrees with another authority other than God.

PONDERING LIFE: When we allow Sin to operate in our life, how do you see it interfering with God's best for our life?

5 **As a result of their disobedience, Adam and Even opened a door to the power behind sin.**

- Because we lost access to the tree of life, sin now rules through the "Fear of Death."
 - **Read Hebrews 2:14-18 (ESV).**

- Sin is a real power because of our conscious and unconscious "fear of death."

- The pressure of death creates a constant self-serving motivation.

Pondering Life: How do you see the "Fear of Death" working against you in your walk with God?

6 **Although the story begins so tragically, at the end of time, we see the same Tree(s) in heaven.**

- There is a climax to the story!
 - **Revelation 22:1-3 (ESV) — 1** Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb **2** through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. **3** No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.

- The mission, since the Fall, has always been about the restoration of The Garden.

PONDERING LIFE: How can the climax of the story actually inform this moment and give us greater victory?