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Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is
God's Plan for Creation
Genesis 1-3
September 10, 2017, Jeff Germs

Today we are beginning our new series called *Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is*. Over the next year or so we are going to be looking at all the major themes of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. The main question we are going to be asking with each sermon is, "What does it mean for us in the twenty first century in Campbell River to be living in God's story?" My prayer is that God's Word will come alive for us and that we will become so in awe of God that our hearts will continually rise up in worship.

Each Sunday we will publish the next week's sermon passages so you can read ahead and come prepared to receive from the Lord. We are going to be looking at some very lengthy passages. We won't have time to read them in their entirety Sunday mornings, so the more reading you do ahead of time, the more you will get out of the sermons.

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Next Sunday we will be looking at the call of Abraham from **Genesis 12:1-9; Genesis 15;** and **Genesis 17:1-8**. Read ahead so you are ready to dig in Sunday mornings. You will be glad you did.

Today we are going to start at the very beginning, from **Genesis 1-3**. This passage forms the base of everything else that follows in the Bible. There are some foundational truths here we need to grapple with in order to understand God's plan so we can purposefully live in HisStory.

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Do you ever wonder what it would be like to have absolutely **no insecurities? No fears?** What if you did not live with **shame?** What would it be like if nobody had insecurities, if everyone looked out for the needs of others, and you never had to wonder what people thought of you because you had no doubt that everyone had your best in mind? What if the overarching motive of every living person was to let love reign supreme in their lives so they could bless others?

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How would that change your life?

That's what it was like before The Fall of humankind in Genesis.

How would it affect your personality? You would be fully you. You would be the best version of yourself. Everyone else would be the best version of themselves. Nobody would try to fit you into their mould. You wouldn't try to fit anyone into your mould. You would let them be them and you would be very happy being you. You wouldn't feel the need to compare yourself to others. Nobody would be trying to one up you or out do you, and you wouldn't be doing that to others. What if that is what life was like? That's what it was like before The Fall in Genesis 3.

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And **what God has been up to since then is restoring that same peace, his *shalom*, that existed in The Garden at the beginning of time.** You know that fleeting feeling you sometimes have? That feeling like "Everything is okay!" That is what *shalom* means. What we are going to see over the next year is that God is calling us to join him in that restoration project to restore his *shalom*, not only to our relationship

with him, but to our relationships with others as well. He wants to use us as his ministers of reconciliation to make something beautiful out of this mess we live in.

We don't have time to read all of Genesis 1-3, so let me paraphrase parts of it and we will read select verses. It begins like this:

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Genesis 1:1-2 (NLT)

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

There is so much mystery in these two verses. Some people try to read things into the text that are not there. What we know is that God created the heavens and the earth from nothing. Before he did that there was nothing but God. That's it. God and nothing else. Father, Son and Holy Spirit - and nothing - not black - as most of us would try to imagine nothingness. There was actually nothing but God. Don't even try to figure that out. It will drive you nuts.

For some reason God decided to create, out of nothing, everything – earth, sky, sun, moon, stars, water, trees, mountains, fish, birds, animals, and then finally his crowning glory, humankind, Adam and Eve.

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Genesis 1:26-31 (NLT)

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.

The first thing I want you to notice is that God made us in his image. Three times it says that in these two verses. The Hebrew here is *tzelem Elohim*. The Latin we hear most often is, *imago dei*. All human beings, whether or not they believe God exists, are made in his image. We were made to be his representatives on earth, his image bearers. Keep that in mind as we go on because when we are not living according to the purpose for which we were created, peace is impossible. The only way peace is possible is when we live according to his purposes.

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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."

God gave humankind a job to do. We are to care for the earth. That's what it means to "govern" or "reign over". We are to be caretakers of the earth and the animals. We are to help it flourish. As followers of Jesus, we, of all people, should be concerned about taking care of creation. That is one of the jobs given to us by God. That is a part of what it means to be made in his image.

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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.***

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31 Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good! And evening passed and morning came, marking the sixth day.

After each phase of creation God “stood back,” so to speak, and looked at his handiwork and said, “It is good.” After the final phase, where he created Adam and Eve he looked at creation and said, “It is very good.” There is something different about human beings. Out of everything he created, only we were made in his image. No other creature has the same kind of worth as human beings. That doesn’t mean that animals don’t have intrinsic worth. They do. One of the jobs God has given us is to care of the animals. But, only human beings are made in the image of God. He has given us the responsibility of caring for his creation.

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In chapter 2 of Genesis we see some more detail about God creating Adam and Eve and putting them in the Garden of Eden and giving them the job of caring for it. Now, lest you think this was hard labour, it wasn’t. This was before there were such things as weeds. God originally set things up so the earth would produce fruit and veggies without much effort. The ground was not yet corrupted.

Things grew - unlike our garden. There are so many things we have to fight off to make sure our garden is producing. It doesn’t come easy at all. We have weeds, wood bugs, and slugs, and birds, and racoons. We have to make sure the soil has the right kinds of nutrients, and the right amount of water. It doesn’t come easy. I’m not sure about your garden, but our garden does not just grow, unless we work hard at it.

Not so in the Garden of Eden. It was literally paradise. Think of any place on earth that you would call paradise. It does not compare at all to Eden. They had every kind of fruit and vegetable imaginable. All organic, of course. There were no pests destroying the fruit. There was the perfect amount of moisture. The perfect amount of sun. It was lush. When they felt like eating they could simply reach out and grab any kind of fresh produce they desired.

God told them they could eat of every fruit in the garden except one. He planted a tree in the middle of the garden called **The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil**. He told them if they ate from that tree they would die. They would not only begin to decay, and age out and eventually physically die. They would also spiritually die. Their intimate relationship with their Creator would be broken. Intimacy with each other would be damaged. They would lose the peace they had. They would no longer trust each other. They would no longer trust God. Life would be hard – if they ate the forbidden fruit.

Chapter three tells us what happened next. Most of you know the story. Satan tempted Adam and Eve to eat from the tree. He used the same tactic with them as he uses with us. He used half truths.

He got them to imagine in their minds what it would be like to taste the fruit. He told them that God wanted to keep them from something good, and that he wanted to prevent them from having fun and “rain on their parade.”

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Genesis 3 (NLT)

4 “You won’t die!” the serpent replied to the woman. 5 “God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.”

Let this sink in. Adam and Eve lived in paradise. They had everything they needed. They lacked nothing. They had peace and intimacy with each other. They had peace and intimacy with God. Along comes Satan and tells them it’s not enough. He dangles the shiny tasty looking fruit in front of them and describes to them in vivid colour, using the most tantalizing language of an expert manipulator, what life could be like if they chose to free themselves from God. They could, in essence, be their own gods.

That sounded like an offer they couldn’t refuse. They give in, as you know. They ate of the fruit. Sin entered the world. Intimacy with God and with each other was broken. From that point on, trust was gone.

Look what happened next.

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Genesis 3 (NLT)

7 At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

Shame. That is where Satan wants us to live. God had, and has, other plans.

Prior to this they had no reason to feel shame. They were living according to the purpose for which God created them. They had no need to hide or cover themselves. They had no reason to pretend. Anxiety, fear, mistrust, hatred, suspicion, and all those other negative feelings, were not even in their lexicon. Their relationships began and ended with trust and intimacy. Then came The Fall.

Look what happened next.

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8 When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the Lord God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the Lord God among the trees. 9 Then the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?” 10 He replied, “I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked.”

They hid from their Creator. This was not God’s plan. His plan was intimacy, trust, authenticity.

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11 “Who told you that you were naked?” the Lord God asked. “Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?”

Now, here’s where the humanness we are all well acquainted with rears its ugly head.

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12 The man replied, “It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it.” 13 Then the Lord God asked the woman, “What have you done?” “The serpent deceived me,” she replied. “That’s why I ate it.”

We are so familiar with the blame game. Adam gets caught with his hand in the cookie jar. He’s caught red handed. For the first time ever, shame caused him to feel the need to point his long finger and

blame someone else for his sin against God. "It was the woman. No, actually, it's *your* fault God. *You* gave her to me."

"The Devil made me do it," came the reply of Eve when God confronted *her*. We all do this. This is the biggest stumbling block to growth, when we don't own our sin.

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We live in a post Fall world. We are broken. We hurt each other, sometimes unintentionally, and sometimes blatantly. Our most natural inclination is to cover up and blame.

Until we own our sin and brokenness we will stay emotionally and spiritually stunted. Refusing to own our sin is like a young child refusing to have his diaper changed. I know that is a pretty ugly metaphor, but it's true. When we cover up and pretend and blame others for our shortcomings and sin, that is exactly what it is like. It is stinky. It's uncomfortable, but we get so that it's all we know and we can't imagine living any other way than in our own stink. It's a terrible way to live, and it is not good for our relationships, as you could well imagine. There are severe consequences to our sin.

After Adam and Eve were caught and tried to pass the blame to each other, to Satan and even to God, God told them what the natural consequence of their sin would look like.

We won't take time to read it all, but **the basic gist of the consequence of sin is that life will be hard** in so many ways.

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Those of us who garden know well that it is not easy to grow a good garden. It takes a lot of learning, growing, cultivating, pulling weeds, making sure the soil conditions are right for the kind of fruit or veggies you are growing. You cannot just throw some seed down and expect to grow a healthy garden. That is, literally, one of the consequences of sin. Life is hard.

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The greater consequence, however, is that sin damages every single relationship we have, firstly with God, and then with others. We lull ourselves into believing that life is about us. "I am the centre of the universe. Everything revolves around me." This is our most natural feeling. It's where I live if I am not purposefully walking with Jesus. I most naturally have a "me first" mindset. So do you. That is a result of The Fall and it damages every relationship we have starting with God.

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Ever since the The Fall, humankind has had an unhealthy unrest. We all know that something is not quite right with us. That feeling is in all of us. We pretend it isn't and do all kinds of things to numb ourselves so we don't feel the pain of that unrest, but it is there, nonetheless. Some feel that unrest desperately. If that's you, you know what I'm talking about. We all have our drug of choice we use to try to anesthetize the pain. Some try running from it. Others hide, or cover up, or work hard. Some do all kinds of good things in an attempt to make amends. Others use their hobbies, or their busyness, or try to be successful, or famous, or popular, or well liked, or have the perfect family, or manage what they imagine is their impeccable image. Some use alcohol, or drugs. Others use ministry. We all have our drug of choice.

Most of those things are not necessarily bad in and of themselves, unless we are using them to cover up. That is the one thing that will keep us from growing.

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Since The Fall, God has been up to something beautiful. He is restoring all creation back to himself. **He is all about bringing that same *shalom* that existed before the fall, back to all our relationships.**

What God wants to do is bring us back to that place of rest - completely. It's what we want, even if we don't know it. Satan would have us believe that we want something else. He would have us believe that freedom is breaking free of God, and doing it our way.

Here is the most beautiful verse in Genesis 1-3.

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Genesis 3:21 (NLT)

21 And the Lord God made clothing from animal skins for Adam and his wife.

This was after Adam and Eve had blatantly turned their backs on God. They chose to believe Satan instead of their Creator. After they had decided to "break free" of God, believing that this was the way to freedom, after covering up and pretending and blaming and pointing their accusing fingers, even at God, he lovingly cares for them. In their brokenness, in their sin, in their shame, in their completely undeserving condition, he loved them and cared for them.

What a great picture. Satan would have us believe that this is not true of God. He would rather have us running, hiding, pretending and covering up so our relationships are irreparable. God has a better plan.

Jesus said what his purpose was in John 10:10.

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John 10:10 (NLT)

The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

Satan, the great counterfeiter, teases us and offers freedom, but instead steals the life from us. Jesus gives us the life we've always wanted, true freedom, joy, love, peace, and intimacy.

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Matthew 11:28-30 (NLT)

28 Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

In my natural self, that is, in those times when I forget what my real identity is, that I am made in the image of God, and that my worth does not depend on my accomplishments, or performance, or success, I have an unhealthy unrest. In those times, I long for someone to tell me that I am okay. In those times, when I forget, I think that rest and satisfaction come from being a good preacher, or having everyone like me, or whatever, instead of finding my rest and satisfaction in my relationship with Jesus. Look at what Jesus said in John 4.

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John 4:14 (NLT)

14 But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life.

Do you remember who Jesus said this to? He said this in a conversation with the Samaritan woman. She was someone who did not have a very stellar reputation. She had been married five times and was living with another man. Jesus offered this imperfect, broken woman her life back. He invited her to enter into relationship with him and stop running and pretending and covering up. ***“Come to me and I will give you rest. Come to me and your search will be over. Stop pretending. Stop hiding. Stop covering up. I have what you are looking for.”***

Don't you long for that?

Think back to the first question I asked you this morning.

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What would your life be like if you had no insecurities, no shame, no fears? What would it be like if your only motivation was love. What would change about your life? What would it change about how you feel about yourself, or about others? That is what God is up to. Jesus is inviting each of us to enter into that kind of rest with him. He is inviting us to give up pretending and finally, once and for all, surrender to him and let him satisfy you.

Every single one of us is broken. There is nobody here this morning who is where they should be. We might as well stop pretending we are. The pressure is off. If you feel stuck in anyway we are here to help you. We have a ministry called Freedom Session that is exactly for that purpose. September 18th at 7:00pm there is an information meeting, introducing the program and then the following week the sessions will begin. If you feel stuck spiritually, or emotionally, or relationally, I would highly recommend that you at least go to the introduction night a week from tomorrow.

Ruth was talking with someone last week who had a conversation with an elderly neighbour who said, "I always had this idea that my life would be sort of like a story book." She said, "I don't remember much of the beginning and middle, and I don't much like how it's ending."

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How about you? **No matter where you are in your life and in your journey with God, he is inviting you deeper.** He wants to give you complete rest and freedom.

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All you need to do is stop hiding and receive from Jesus. Learn from him. Let him teach you, and he said you will find rest for your soul.

That is what God has been up to since The Fall. He is all about restoring our relationships and bringing us back to the peace that was once in the garden. What we will see next week, when we take a look at the call of Abraham, is that Jesus is inviting us to be healed and restored by him so we can be a blessing to the nations and a part of his great rescue mission in Campbell River.



**Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is
God's Plan for Creation**

Genesis 1-3

Week of September 10, 2017

Objective of this study: To see how Jesus is inviting us to find rest for our souls so our relationships with others and God can be healed and thriving.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Worship (5 - 10 minutes)

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalm 8** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you. **Did anything jump out at you?**

Welcome (5 minutes)

Describe your most embarrassing moment. (We've used this before but it's fun to learn to laugh at ourselves.)

[It's really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

Word/Work (30-45 minutes)

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. Read Genesis 1-3
 1. Describe what life was like before The Fall.
 2. Describe how Satan was an expert manipulator.
 3. What did Satan promise them?
 4. What did they get instead? Describe life after The Fall. (Consequences of sin)
5. Read John 10:10 and Matthew 11:28-30.
 1. From these two passages what kind of life does God have for us?

Quietly by yourself (10 minutes)

6. How have you seen Satan's tactics at work in your own life? (For example: believing half truths; wanting to break free from God; thinking God wants you to not have any fun...)
7. What is your "drug of choice?" Share if you feel comfortable.
8. Where do you see fear, shame, hiding, blaming, "me first" etc. causing difficulty in your relationships?
9. Knowing all this, how would you like to respond to God and others?

Regroup (10 minutes)

10. Describe how your life would be different if you daily took Jesus' invitation in Matthew 11:28-30
11. Describe how your life would be different if you had no insecurities, no shame, no fear, and your only motive was love.
12. Pray for each other.