

Relating

Foundations for the New Normal, July 18-19, 2020 | Genesis 2:5-9, Romans 8:14-17

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WE ARE LIVING IN A NEW NORMAL.

Some moments in time change everything about life.

One of the moments that changed my life happened when I was a senior in high school.

I was invited to go with a group of friends to Orlando, which was an hour away from my home.

I wanted to go, so I asked my parents for permission.

They were worried that where I was going would easily lead to trouble.

At the same time, they were trying to help me learn to make decisions for myself, since I was going away to college the next year and would be making all of these decisions for myself.

So they told me, "We don't think it's a good idea, but it's your decision to make. Just know that if you go, you're going against our advice, and it will change our relationship forever."

That was all the green light I needed. "Okay, I'll call my friends and let them know I'm coming."

They stopped me and reminded me one more time, "Do what you think is best, but if you go it's going to change our relationship forever." Then I went to shower and got ready to go.

That night did change my relationship with my parents. It was the beginning of my making more of my own decisions. At that point in my life, that was what I wanted, and it was time.

But I know my parents are watching right now, so I want to say to them and to every one of you that, as much as things change, some things stay the same. They are wonderful parents, and to this day I still value their opinions and input and wisdom.

We are living in a new normal right now. Three objects symbolize how life has changed.

The first has to be the FACE MASK [project picture of face mask]. Wearing face masks has become the law and custom in many places. If you go in public without a face mask, people stare at you, and they aren't staring at you admiringly. They feel that you are putting us all at risk. That's a complete turnaround in our culture in a very short time.

The second symbol of how life has changed is the RING LIGHT [project picture of ring light]. I had never heard of a ring light before the outbreak. But if you spend significant time in video conferences, ring lights make a dramatic difference in how you look on a web camera.

The third symbol of this new day is the CARPET CIRCLE [project picture of office]. In the future, people who design office spaces think we will have our temperatures checked when we go into office

buildings, we will travel in one direction through buildings, and we will sit six feet apart with shields to protect us.¹

Where is all this going? In an article from April, an author in Forbes magazine made some predictions about the new normal.

Some things that she wrote were absolutely prophetic: She wrote that we would be even more likely to shop online and that we would be more eager to work from home. Those predictions have already come true.

The jury is out on some predictions she made, though: She thought that supply chains would become more local and less global. We'll see.

The only prediction that Forbes made that is absolutely undeniable is this: "Loss of trust will take time to recover." - Suzy Taherian, *Forbes*²

These days have strained our trust in one another, and that has put tremendous strain on our relationships.

To respond to the new normal, we really need to reaffirm some of our most important foundations so that we are prepared for whatever comes.

Of course, Jesus is the solid rock upon which we build our faith and our lives.

And there are certain foundational proclamations the Bible makes about Jesus' followers.

These foundational proclamations tell us who we are in Christ.

Knowing who we are gives us a foundation to stand on.

And that foundation becomes what we build our lives on.

When we know who we are, we can act rather than react.

So, who are we? We begin today with the foundational proclamation that the Bible makes that followers of Jesus are sons and daughters of God.

That claim has profound implications for how we fit into the new normal.

FOUNDATION: WE ARE ADOPTED CHILDREN OF GOD.

Why are we adopted as children of God? For us, it's because of the accomplished work of Jesus.

Before Jesus, we were separated from God and stood before him sinful and guilty.

We didn't belong in God's family in any way.

But things changed dramatically because of Jesus. Paul reminds us in **Romans 3:23-25** that we were separated from God, but he adds that Jesus justified us by his sacrifice on the cross:

[F]or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his

¹ <https://www.fastcompany.com/90488060/our-offices-will-never-be-the-same-after-covid-19-heres-what-they-could-look-like> on 2020-07-12.

² Suzy Taherian, "The New World: How The World Will Be Different After COVID-19." *Forbes* on April 7, 2020. Accessed at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/suzytaherian/2020/04/07/the-new-world-how-the-world-will-be-different-after-covid-19/#eaff40c5d158> on 2020-07-10.

blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

Paul goes on to say elsewhere in Romans that what Jesus did brought peace between us and God. That peace replaced the wrath that we should be receiving from God because of our sin. (Romans 5:1-2)

When we accept what Jesus did through faith, grace floods into our lives and changes absolutely everything for us.

How are we adopted as children of God? What Paul wrote in Romans 8:14-17 tells us.

In **Romans 8:14** Paul wrote,

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

As we saw last week in our study of the prophet Joel, when we become followers of Jesus, we all get the Spirit of God or the Holy Spirit. Everyone who has the Holy Spirit and is led by the Holy Spirit is adopted as a son or daughter of God. That is an absolutely astounding promise!

Then in **Romans 8:15** Paul added,

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"

The spirit of slavery that Paul wrote about means that we were slaves to sin and death and evil before we met Jesus. But Jesus set us free; the Spirit of God sets us free. Now we don't want to go back; we don't want to become slaves again. Instead, the Spirit of God causes our adoption to happen. We get a family. The Spirit puts us in a new position with God and helps us to call God "Abba, Father" (a term of endearment and family closeness).

Then Paul goes on to write in **Romans 8:16-17**

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

The Spirit of God convicts us deep down inside that we are now children of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus, heirs who will one day receive glory.

Wow! We are children of God! Doesn't that make you sit up a little bit straighter today? We're children of God if we're followers of Jesus. So what are the implications of that fact?

IMPLICATION #1: WE ARE CREATED FOR A REASON.

In Genesis 2:5-6 we start to see that God had a reason when he made the first man:

When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground

...

God had already created the world.

However, the small plants of the field had not "yet sprung up."

Why? Because the LORD God had not caused the rain to start falling. Instead, at the beginning, a mist would come up from the land and water the ground.

Plants of the field hadn't sprung up yet either, because the ground hadn't been tilled. As God designed creation, it takes the man ("ha adam" in Hebrew) working the ground ("ha adammah"), and the LORD God had not yet made the man.

Genesis 2:7 fills in the picture in a touching, very personal kind of way:

... then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

"The Man" that the LORD God created was not a creation "ex-nihilo" or "out of nothing" but out of something, "of dust from the ground."

The LORD God took the dust of the ground and formed "the Man" from it.

Then the LORD God breathed into "the Man's" nostrils the breath of life.

Only when God took dust, shaped it, and filled it with the breath of life did "The Man" become a living creature.

Genesis 2:8-9 finishes the picture:

And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The LORD God planted a garden in Eden in the east and put "the Man" there.

The LORD God provided for "the Man" in the garden by giving him every tree "that is pleasant to the sight and good for food." It's a touching picture of God providing exactly what "the Man" needed.

What I hope you see is that when God created the first human being, he did it on purpose, himself, with loving attention to every detail.

Why is it important when we're talking about being sons and daughters of God to talk about God's creating us on purpose with a reason?

I mean, God made plenty of things that aren't sons and daughters.

God made bushes, for instance, but they aren't his children.

For our purposes today, it isn't really that important for us to think about what God did with the rest of creation. Just for today, what I want you to think about in this picture is the amount of care and intentionality that God took with you.

Because what God did here didn't end. God didn't just create the first human being intentionally and lovingly, and then walk away from the rest of us.

Psalms 139:13-14 reminds us:

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.

Scripture says about all of us that God creates us intentionally from the beginning of our lives.

And in response, the author praises God for what he has done. That's the exact right response!

So the Bible confirms that God personally, lovingly, created you son or daughter of God.

And the Bible confirms that God personally, lovingly, created me.

Do you ever the question, “Why me? Why now?”

Frankly, there are times when I ask that question.

I think it’s ironic that God has me leading in the church, when so much of what we’re doing requires the use of technology.

There was a time when I was in my 20s when I was the guy on staff who got technology.

I remember when we got the first printer in the office of one of the churches I served.

I couldn’t wait to hook my computer up to the printer, so I ran a printer cable up the wall of my office, through the ceiling, and down the wall to the printer located on the receptionist’s desk.

I thought I was pretty clever, but the pastor I worked with at the time was in his mid 40s, and he was very uncomfortable with technology. He was worried that I was somehow going to break the printer by hooking up to it.

Oh, I laughed at him at the time. Now I’m that guy!

Let me be completely transparent with you all for just a moment: I don’t understand all the technology that we use right now, and I don’t understand all of the technology that we will have to use as we pivot online to keep reaching people in this new normal.

I just want to preach and lead; I don’t want to think about the technology involved.

So there are days when I ask “God, why me? Why now?”

However, we know that God has a reason for you and me.

This is actually an important statement of faith.

If we say that we live in the wrong time, then what we’re really saying is that God made a mistake by giving us these days to live in.

And if we say that we don’t have the gifts we need for the days in which we live, then we’re saying that God somehow messed things up.

That’s not what we believe! God doesn’t make mistakes! And God loves us; he doesn’t short-change us.

Instead, we believe that God set us down at this point in time, because this is the point in time in which he wanted us to live. He made us for these days!

And we have exactly the gifts that we need for these days. Why? Because God made us this way! He did it on purpose and with love.

That’s the way we have to approach every day in the new normal.

IMPLICATION #2: WE ARE CREATED FOR A RELATIONSHIP.

The Plan: Genesis reminds us that we were created for fellowship with God.

As we read earlier, when God planted a garden in Eden in the east, he put the man he had created there and gave him everything he needed to eat and work to do.

In the passages that follow, we find that God spent time with the Man face to face.

They had a relationship with one another. It would be appropriate to call the relationship close and personal.

That’s the way God created us! He wants us to abide with him.

The Pattern: Jesus showed us what fellowship with God is supposed to look like.

In **Luke 5:16** we find Jesus following a familiar pattern. It says:

But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.

The “he” in the passage is Jesus, and Jesus had just been through a period of intense public ministry where people were pressing in on him with expectations.

Jesus had been giving life and healing.

But after Jesus was done (and while there was still so much work left that could be done), Jesus withdrew from the public and went to a place where he could be alone.

When he got alone, he prayed. He talked with God the Father.

Throughout the Gospels we find Jesus talking with his Father. Early in the morning, late at night, when he was stressed, when he was tired, God the Son spent time with God the Father.

In some ways you’d want to say, “Well, if Jesus needed prayer, then we need it even more!”

That is true. But it misses the whole fact that what Jesus was really doing was just spending time with his Father. He was living in relationship with God the Father. And that is also the model Jesus is setting for us.

The Position: Paul tells us that we are adopted to fellowship with God.

That was the point of what Paul wrote in Romans 8:15. He wrote that now that we are adopted sons and daughters of God, we are put into a close, family relationship with him.

So, now we get to use the term for God the Father that Jesus, our older brother, does.

We get to call God, “Abba, Father.” The word “Abba” is an Aramaic word close to “Daddy.”

The LORD God is interested in us. He’s our Heavenly Father. He’s our dad.

Nothing can take that away from us, because it depends entirely on God and not on us.

IMPLICATION #3: WE ARE CREATED FOR A RESPONSE.

The new normal pulls us away from relationships.

In an article for the Association for Psychological Science, a professor from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, compared the current crisis to a massive external stressor in a marriage.

Marriages work when both partners see each other as accepting, understanding, supportive, and out for the welfare of the other.

External stressors (like COVID-19, in particular) make us doubt the goodness of the other. And when we doubt the goodness of the other, we tend to blame, criticize, and argue. We stop listening and believing.³

This season is making it more difficult to trust one another.

And that is pulling us away from the relationships that we were made for!

³ Paula Pietromonaco, “APS Backgrounder Series: Psychological Science and COVID-19: Pandemic Effects on Marriage and Relationships.”

<https://www.psychologicalscience.org/news/backgrounders/backgrounder-marriage-and-relationships.html> on July 12, 2020.

The new normal pulls us away from relationships, and that includes with God!

The new normal has made it easier to make it to worship each week, which is great! But (ironically) going to worship in our pajamas with a cup of coffee and a bowl of oatmeal also makes it easier eventually to just pass altogether.

And while some of us have had more “time” on our hands with fewer distractions, it has (ironically) made it more difficult for many of us to pick up our Bibles, study them, and pray.

And many of us have had a more difficult time than ever finding ways to serve God actively, show his love, and multiply disciples of Jesus.

The coronavirus has given us the opportunity to connect with God, but it has sapped our will.

The new normal is pulling us away from God more than ever!

But we were created for relationship! And in a relationship, we’ve got to respond.

Let’s respond by lamenting.

When you’re in a real relationship, you’ve got to be open and tell the truth.

These are days to tell God the truth.

And in many cases, what we’re going to need to tell God is that we are hurting and confused and afraid and disappointed.

That’s a lament. The Bible is filled with laments. It’s a faithful way to respond to God.

Pour out your heart to God. Be honest with Him about how you feel!

Let’s respond by listening.

Listening is one of the basic jobs of any follower of Jesus.

In **John 15:9** Jesus told us to abide in him. He said,

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.”

Jesus’ call for us to abide is grounded in the geography of a relationship. It means to be together, to dwell with, to stay in relationship.

For Jesus, abiding means listening. We want to listen as we pray. We want to learn while we study. We want to listen as we figure out how to live. We want to get to know God.

That’s what sons and daughters of God really do.

During this “new normal,” we’re listening to all kinds of voices. We must listen to God and spend time with our Father. This must be the most important voice.

Let’s respond by leaning in.

This can be an awful, dry, dull time when we pull away from many of the relationships we hold dear, even our relationship with God.

Or this can be a rich, vibrant season when we lean into what matters most—particularly our relationship with God—and come out stronger disciples of Jesus in the end.

Let’s lean into this season and lean into the love of our Heavenly Father.