

The Story: Chapter One
Experiencing the "Withed-ness" of God
Pastor Dave Scherrer - September, 11, 2011

Genesis 1:1

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Creation is amazing isn't it. It is easy to forget just how wonderful this world is. We grow to take the beauty of the earth for granted. But what if we pulled back just a bit?

Imagine the Creator of the universe "out there" somewhere. Compared to the earth that he created, "out there" is so vast as to be immeasurable. For example, the earth is one of the smallest of the eight planets that make up a huge galaxy. But "out there" is bigger than a galaxy. In 1996, astronomers focused the powerful Hubble Space Telescope on a small and utterly black patch of space right next to the Big Dipper constellation. They left the shutter open for ten days.

What did it reveal? Three thousand *more* galaxies each of them containing hundreds of billions of stars, planets, moons, comets and asteroids. In 2004, scientists did it again. This time they focused the scope on a patch of darkness next to the constellation Orion. They left the lens open for eleven days and they found this:



1. Stars! Billions and billions of them . . .

They discovered *ten thousand more* galaxies in addition to the previous three thousand that had appeared the first time. Scientists call this the Ultra Deep Field, and it represents the farthest humankind has ever seen into the universe. But even more is "out there," beyond our ability to see.

2. Two galaxies looking like a rose from ARP 273 (Or UGC 1810)
3. Sombrero Galaxy 4. Whirlpool Galaxy 5. Ant Nebula 6. Mystic Mountain Nebula

It turns out there are over *one hundred billion* galaxies in the universe.

But it wasn't always this way. In the beginning everything was formless, empty, and dark. The Bible tells us "the Spirit of God was hovering" over this nothingness before he went to work creating a space where he could enjoy fellowship with you and me. (Genesis 1:2; *The Story*, p.1).

Think about this for a moment. In all this majesty and space, God was designing something special for us. We are the crowning masterpiece of his creativity. All of this creation we have seen in these slides and in the video is about God's love for us. In all this vastness He created for us a home. Not just a home, as we will see he placed us in a garden! It is all about God wanting to be with us!

Genesis, the first book in the story of God's interactions with and plan for mankind, provides us with an amazing starting point. The importance of these first few chapters of the Bible cannot be overstated. It helps us understand so much, it provides us so much background to the questions that haunt our culture today. It deals with where we came from and therefore the meaning of life. It deals with the value of human life and sexuality, gender issues and roles, family – the origin of evil. It addresses so much! Really, creation is only the subplot of this book.

Let's look at that first verse again. "In the beginning" God . . . Like I said a few moments ago, it is evident to me that God is the main character of this story. We would be incorrect and maybe a bit self absorbed to think of this mainly about creation and the beginning of mankind. That is of course true but Genesis chapters 1 and 2 tells us so much more about God than it does about us. We learn that God desired to bring heaven down to earth – first to create a paradise and then men and women in his own image, and

then to come down and do life with us. Perfectly with us. Just as he had experienced perfect oneness – withed-ness - as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The *real* point of Genesis is so amazing it's almost unbelievable: ***God wants to be with us***. The God of the universe has created a place to come down and be with a community of people. He no longer wanted only to enjoy the perfect community he had as the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). He wanted to share it with us.

The first chapter of Genesis is like a construction work log that reads like poetry. The sequence and pattern are simple, but almost too overwhelming to take in. On days one, two, and three, God paints the places of new creation on the canvas of nothingness. Then on days four, five, and six, he puts objects in each place to fill this space. Here is how the week breaks down:

Days 1 through 3

Day 1 – Light/darkness (vs 3 – 5) (And God saw that “It was good!”)

Day 2 – Water and sky (vs 6 – 8)

Day 3 – Land (vs 9 – 13)

Days 4 through 6

Day 4 – Sun, moon, stars (vs 14 – 18)

Day 5 – Fishes and birds (vs 20 – 23)

Day 6 – Animals (vs 24 – 25)

But while the creation of the heavens and the earth and the other billions of galaxies is impressive, it is not the point of the story. Mount Everest. The Grand Canyon. The stark beauty of the Sahara, the cascading elegance of Victoria Falls. Those amazing animals that fill our world. Combine these and thousands of other jewels of his creative powers, and you're not even close to identifying the core passion of God. Those are just the display cases to highlight his *real* work of art.

The pride and joy of God's handiwork, the point of it all, is revealed in a little later in the creation story of Genesis 1:

Genesis 1:26 – 27, 31

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

And it was VERY GOOD!

You see, the perfect and beautiful world God created was incomplete without his crowning achievement – people made in His image that he could enjoy and love and with whom he could communicate. Adam and Eve, you and me, and everyone in between. He had a passion to expand the wonderful community experienced by the triune God. And we know he was proud of this final creative act, because this time he stepped back and declared, “This is **very** good.”

CRITICAL CONTENT BLOCK

With this final creative act, God's plan was in place. This is the prologue to the entire history of God and mankind. Everything begins with God. The universe, the galaxies, our little planet, animals, men and

women – all were God’s idea. His vision was to spend eternity in a perfect community enjoying the fellowship of people he created in his own image. He *chose* to bring you and me into the world for his pleasure, and to this day he yearns to be *with* you. To walk beside you and experience all of life with you, in both the deepest valleys and the highest mountains.

Of course, the big question is: *Why?* Why would God step outside of his perfect Upper Story and come down into our Lower Story?

If you are a parent, you get it.

At some point in your relationship with your spouse, you wanted to share your life with another human being – one whom you would create together. In preparation for that new little human to arrive on earth, you did your best to create a perfect environment – perhaps a special room, a sturdy crib, comfy blankets, a fuzzy teddy bear, and bright pictures on the wall. With each passing month, you grew more excited, knowing that in just a short time, you would be joined by someone so special that you would do anything to protect and nurture this new arrival. Someone who would perhaps be your spitting image. Mostly, you just wanted to be *with* that person. Finally it was time. A tiny bundle wrapped in a soft blanket entered your life, and the joy you felt when you first looked into her face was indescribable.

So it is with God, looking into the eyes of Adam and Eve and saying, “This is *very* good.” And it *was* good – not just the creation of human life, but his plan for it. Just as parents dream of a bright future for their children, God envisioned not just a good life for us, but a perfect one. It was almost as if God were saying, “This is going to be great. A beautiful garden. An abundance of food. No disease. No sadness. Even the lions and the lambs get along. And best of all, people to hang out with as they enjoy the pleasures of this world that I have made for them.”

TRANSITION

Like Adam and Eve’s first chapter, your story begins with God looking into your face and saying, “This is good – this is *really* good.” But something went wrong. God intended for you to never suffer, but if you haven’t yet, you will. He wants you to experience perfect harmony with your neighbors, but you hardly know them. He wants you to live forever in the garden he made for you, but you will one day die – and besides, you don’t always feel as if you’re living in a garden. God wanted to be with you in unbridled intimacy but sometimes you aren’t even sure if God is really there. God dreamed a perfect life for you, but some days you feel as if you’re living in a nightmare.

So what happened?

In the midst of this perfect environment that God had created, something shifted.

When God gave Adam and Eve a perfect home in the garden, he also gave them something else: *freedom*, freedom to choose. Rather than force them into a relationship with him, he gave them a freedom to choose whether they wanted to be with him or go it alone. To provide a way for them to accept or reject his divine vision, God set two trees in the middle of the garden. One was the tree of life, which bore fruit that when eaten would sustain life forever. The other was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Even before God created Eve, he told Adam . . .

Genesis 2:16-17

“You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”

God told him that if he ate the fruit of that tree, he would die. What Adam didn’t understand was that with his death, the plan God had envisioned for life together with him in the garden would die too because their choice would determine mankind’s fate from that point on.

We are not told how much time passed between this conversation and Adam and Eve's eventual choice, but we do know that they chose to disobey God's specific command. According to Scripture, a serpent – a creature we later learn was Satan disguised, appeared before Eve and told her that if she and Adam ate from the forbidden tree, they would be like God. This made good sense to them, so they ignored God and ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

We read about it in Genesis 3:

Genesis 3:6-11

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.

She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

The tree and the fruit and the bad choice all lived up to its name. Evil was deposited in the DNA of Adam and Eve – and in the DNA of every human being who came after them. At the core of this evil, which is called sin throughout the Bible, is selfishness. (Genesis 4:7 is the first time evil actions were referred to as sin.) Good looks out for others; evil looks out for self. Selfishness is the root of hatred, jealousy, violence, anger, lust, and greed. Adam and Eve were covered in it.

From that time on, the grand vision of God to dwell with us sat in ruins. Because of Adam and Eve's role as the first humans, their disobedience became an inheritance for the rest of us. Authentic love and community require both parties to choose each other, but from the beginning, mankind chose to reject God. Self-preservation became more important than anything else, and we see this played out immediately after this infamous incident.

Knowing they had done something wrong, Adam and Eve went into hiding, but God sought them out and asked if they had eaten the forbidden fruit. Instead of taking responsibility for his actions, Adam blames Eve. Eve, instead of taking responsibility for her actions, blames the snake. This brief scene depicts the now-broken community of God and mankind. Instead of walking with God in the garden, they are hiding and just as then, we still hide from the God who longs to be with us. But we do not want to be with Him because we know the difference between good and bad and recognize ourselves as bad. We are filled with shame, guilt, and insecurity. The relationship that God had envisioned is now broken. Just as we forget how beautiful our world is, sometimes we forget just how broken our world is too:

VIDEO on The Fall

Genesis 3:22 – 24

And the Lord God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life. (*The Story*, pp. 6 – 7.)

Now why would God do this? Drive them out of the Garden of Eden, the Garden of "Delight"? In a way it was for our protection. He banned us from the garden lest we "take also of the Tree of Life and eat and live forever". Can you imagine a more terrible fate than to live forever in this fallen world with our fallen

relationships and our fallen hearts and fallen bodies? No, God had a plan to restore us to Him and to ourselves. And for the next 2376 chapters in the Bible, God is working out that plan of History.

The rest of the Story is the greatest story ever told - a story of redemption and restoration. God's plan continues. We have to keep reading! Does it make you want to turn to the end of the book to see what happens to these poor people?

At the end of the Adam and Eve story there is a grand hint, a foreshadowing of things to come. Adam and Eve are hiding from God because of their nakedness. They have been laid bare and this nakedness shows off their sin. So they cover themselves with fig leaves. God knows that their nakedness must be covered so he fashions clothes for them. Their covering of their sin – now watch this – required the shedding of blood. For the first time in recorded history, something had to die to begin the restoration process. Now we can fast forward a bit to Romans:

Romans 5:6-8

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:10-11

For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

As Paul Harvey used to say – This is “the rest of the story.” We no longer have to hide from God and try to cover up our sin with good but not good enough performances and lame excuses and blaming.

You are the point of God's Story. He is going to do everything He can to get us back. I hope over the next 9 months as we search out together the Story of God and the Story of your life as God draws you to himself that you will Experience the 'Withed-ness' of God in a way you never dreamed possible.