

Pastor Jonna Bohigian
Created for Relationship with God
Genesis 2:4 – 18

Today, we begin week one of a five-part sermon series entitled “Human Being.” The genesis of this series came from a variety of reflections – reflections on the polarization and incivility in our nation, reflections on my conversations with you, and my personal reflections.

We expect a lot from ourselves and from each other. We are often surprised and embarrassed by our sense of need and by our vulnerable emotions. Perhaps we have heard the encouragement that we are “human beings” and not “human doings.” But what does it mean to be a human being? In this series, we will unpack what it means to be a human being, rooted in the story of Genesis, rooted in the story of creation.

My cousin, Mark, is a newlywed, and I had the opportunity to meet his wife, Thai, at our recent family reunion. Thai shared that as a person of Chinese descent, she grew up Buddhist. For her family, however, Buddhism was a cultural religion and not a practiced religion.

Thai went to a Jesuit undergraduate school, and wanted to test a professor’s faith. She said, “If I believed in God, I would believe that God created the world and then stepped away. God is *not* a personal God.” She waited to hear what her professor might say.

“That’s what I believe too,” he said.

Thai said that shortly after that conversation, she reasoned that she was an atheist. If this learned man of God believed that God was not a personal God, there

was really no reason to believe in Him. If this was the Christian belief, there was nothing attractive about it. If God did not want anything to do with her, this God may as well not exist.

The belief that God created the world and stepped away once creation was finished is called "Deism." This belief holds that God watches what happens on earth – the destruction, hatred, chaos, and despair – and does nothing to intervene; He simply watches. Or, Deists believe that God is simply so far away that He cannot see.

In 1990, Bette Midler popularized a song entitled "From a Distance." Perhaps you remember it.

From a distance
 The world looks blue and green
 And the snow capped mountains white
 From a distance
 The ocean meets the stream
 And the eagle takes to flight

From a distance
 There is harmony
 And it echoes through the land
 It's the voice of hope
 It's the voice of peace
 It's the voice of every man

From a distance
 We all have enough
 And no one is in need
 And there are no guns, no bombs and no disease
 No hungry mouths to feed
 From a Distance
 We are instruments
 Marching in a common band
 Playing songs of hope
 Playing songs of peace
 They are the songs of every man

God is watching us
 God is watching us

God is watching us
From a distance

From a distance
You look like my friend
Even though we are at war
From a distance
I just cannot comprehend
What all this fighting's for
From a distance
There is harmony
And it echoes through the land
And it's the hope of hopes
It's the love of loves
It's the heart of every man

God is watching us
God is watching us
God is watching us
From a distance¹

When I was young, this song would play frequently on the radio. And every time it played, my mom would interrupt. "Gross. God is *not* watching us from a distance. God is near to us." My mom is a sweet person, but if she doesn't like something, her family *knows* it. She did *not* like this song because of its impersonal, Deistic theology, and she wanted us to *know* it.

As we consider the creation narrative in the book of Genesis, we receive a very different kind of narrative than what Deism offers. Genesis 2 describes a God who is the protagonist of the story and creates with intention. He waits to create His garden and any plants until He has created man. He creates man of the dust of the earth and breathes into his nostrils the breath of life. The man becomes a living being (Gen 2:7). God then plants a garden in Eden and places the man in it. This is no

¹ http://www.lyricsfreak.com/b/bette+midler/from+a+distance_20016990.html

accidental creation, no careless act. This is intentional, personal, and intimate. He creates man with a purpose, to care for and to work the garden.

God then speaks to the man. He gives the man permission to eat of every tree in the garden but one. He prohibits the man from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, “for in the day that [he eats] of it, [he] will surely die” (Gen 2:17b).

God decides that it is not good for the man to be alone, for he will need a helper in the garden. He creates animals of all kinds from the ground, but none of them are the kind of helper the man needs. So, God causes the man to fall asleep, and God creates woman.

Once all of creation has been completed, God does not step away. In chapter 3 verse 8, Genesis describes God “walking in the garden in the cool of the day.” The man and woman have eaten from the forbidden tree, and God engages them in a conversation. He knows that they have eaten from the forbidden tree. They are deserving of death, but God does not kill them. God pronounces curses over them, but He doesn’t kill them. He is gracious to them. He sends them away from the garden, and they live.

The man and woman leave the garden, and the story continues. God continues to be a part of their story, to speak to their family, to warn them, to care for them. He does not leave them.

The Christian Scriptures speak time and time again of a God who is not satisfied to stay remote from us. He sent His only Son to earth to live and to die for us, so that we might once again be united in relationship with God.

Human beings were *created* for a relationship with God. You and I were not created by a careless God and then abandoned. You and I were created for a relationship with the God of the universe.

Perhaps you struggle to believe that God wants a relationship with you. Your life circumstances don't seem to indicate that God is present to you or that He cares about what is happening in your life. You pray and you don't seem to see answers. You have been hurt, and perhaps hurt by the church. You see the evil around you and wonder how God could allow it. You have reasons for your skepticism.

But you also know that there must be something bigger than you, something bigger than your thoughts and your desires. You know deep within yourself that there must be something *more*.

My husband, Alek, grew up in a Christian home and in a Christian church. When he went to college, he concluded that there *was* a God, but that He was not a personal God. So Alek lived the life he wanted to live.

One morning, around 6am, he heard a voice that he knew was not his own. "Are you done yet? Are you ready to follow me?" Alek knew that God was calling him. God was calling him to live for Him. Alek describes this moment as so compelling, that all he could do was obey. He knew at that moment, that God had a purpose for him and that God would be with him.

Alek's story is not everyone's story. Not everyone hears God's voice in such a clear way and is so overwhelmed by God's presence that it compels a response. Alek describes his story as like the Apostle Paul's story in Acts 9, and he recognizes that God speaks to most of us differently.

As a human being, you have been created to be in relationship with God. He *knows* you and loves you and wants to be known and loved *by* you.