



FOUNDATIONS FOR HOLISTIC MINISTRY

LESSON TWO - "CREATION: WHO ARE WE?"

Introduction to the Lesson

This lesson will explore what it means to be human. What sets humans apart from the rest of God's creation? This lesson will also look at what it means to define humanity holistically. It explores the question of why we tend to separate ourselves into the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. After today's lesson you will be able to discuss what it means to view humanity holistically, the uniqueness of humanity, and begin a discussion of how to minister holistically.

Key scripture: Genesis 1:1-28; Genesis 2:7; Genesis 2:18-22; John 9

Key points:

- o God created humanity in a way that sets us apart from the rest of creation
- o Human beings were holistic from the beginning
- o Humanity was created to be in relationship with God and others

Lesson

How do we determine what it really means to be human? Does psychology hold the answers? What about sociology or anthropology? Each of these disciplines gives us insight into humanity but, as Christians, we also turn to scripture to learn what it means to be truly human. Our exploration of humanity will begin at the beginning: Genesis 1 and 2. These scriptural accounts are not meant to be historical fact or scientific theory. They are theological reflections on the creation of the world.

The Physical World

In Genesis 1 (vv.1-28), we find God speaking the physical world into being: water, sky, earth, plants, and animals. The key point to notice in this creation story is that God spoke this creation into being. After the material world was created, God then reflected on God's work and deemed it good.

Humanity

In Genesis 2:7, we find God creating humanity in God's image. God creates humanity in a way that is very different from the way God created the physical world.

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

In Genesis 1, God created by speaking the physical world into existence. However, in Genesis 2 we find God creating humanity through a very different means: breath. The term breath in Hebrew can also be translated Spirit. God does not merely speak humanity into existence, but actually forms the human and breathes life into his nostrils. God, with great intentionality, acts. God breathes God's spirit into humanity in a way that separates us from animals and God's other creation, which God speaks into existence.

Humanity's unique role

God's unique role for humanity also sets us apart from the rest of creation. God gave humanity a role in God's creation. We are the caretakers of God's world. According to Psalm 8:3-9, God placed humanity slightly lower than God's self in the created world.

Relationship

Another way in which humanity is unique among God's creation is that God determined humans had the need for relationship (Genesis 2:18-22). God in God's self is a relational being. God exists as the Trinity- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God created humanity in God's image, therefore God created humanity as relational beings as God is relational. Humanity was created first to relate to God and secondly to relate to one another.

Holistic

If we look at people in this way, with a need for relationship with God and with others, this is part of what it means to look at a person holistically. Another key point to note is that this holistic view of humanity came before the fall of humanity. What makes us whole—a physical/material body, a spirit that relates to God, the need to live in relationship to each other—came before the fall.

The dualistic view of human beings as having separate parts, a physical body and a soul (or spiritual part), was not part of the Hebraic, Old Testament world-view. This belief that the body and soul are two separate parts of the person is a Hellenistic idea that played no part in the creation narratives. In the Hebraic mindset, there is only a whole person made alive by the breath of God.

Much of what we assume in Western society comes not from the Biblical and theological interpretation of the Bible but from this Greek philosophy. In this philosophy the body is evil and the soul is good. This Hellenistic philosophy can be seen in Paul's letters to the early Christians. However, one must keep in mind that Paul is trying to communicate the Gospel to a Hellenistic culture. He is communicating the Gospel to them in their own language.

When we look at the work of Jesus, however, we see that he holds to the Hebraic view of the person. This can be seen in John 9, where Jesus heals a blind man. This healing using the dust of the earth is reminiscent of the way in which humanity was created. After Jesus places the mud upon the blind man, Jesus sends him to wash in the Temple pool. He was deeply connected to both the man's physical and spiritual wellbeing. This is typical of Jesus' healing ministry. In a synthesis of the four gospels, Jesus performs acts of healing over twenty times. Many of the accounts of his healing include both physical and spiritual aspects. Jesus practiced holistic ministry.

Class Discussion

- o How do we describe ourselves as humans? Discuss this with the group at your table.
- o If God created humanity as holistic beings from the beginning, why is it that we tend to emphasize/deemphasize certain aspects of our common humanity?
- o In what ways does your church work to minister to whole people? Are there any programs/activities that seem lopsided?

Individual Reflection

What does it mean to you that humanity, that you, were created in a special and distinct way from the rest of creation? Was this idea something new to you? Will it change, in any way, the way you view people?

Benediction

Folliott S. Pierpoint, a hymn writer in the 19th century, penned the words to this familiar hymn on a beautiful spring day when he became overwhelmed with the goodness of God's beautiful creation, the senses to appreciate it, and the special gifts of God to us through human relationships. Let the words of "For the Beauty of the Earth" serve as a prayer of gratitude for our wholeness today:

For the beauty of the earth,
For the glory of the skies;
For the love which from our birth,
Over and around us lies;
Lord of all, to Thee we raise
This, our hymn of grateful praise.

For the wonder of each hour,
Of the day and of the night;
Hill and vale and tree and flow'r,
Sun and moon, and stars of light;
Lord of all, to Thee we raise
This, our hymn of grateful praise.

For the joy of ear and eye,
For the heart and mind's delight;
For the mystic harmony,
Linking sense to sound and sight;
Lord of all, to Thee we raise
This, our hymn of grateful praise.

For the joy of human love,
Brother, sister, parent, child;
Friends on Earth and friends above,
For all gentle thoughts and mild;
Lord of all, to Thee we raise
This, our hymn of grateful praise.



Call To Be Attentive

As you go about your daily life this week, pay attention to the ways in which you minister. Spend time reflecting or journaling your interactions with people this week.

Are you seeing people differently? Has what you learned from this lesson transformed the ways that you view people? If so, how? Will you consider sharing these stories at your next meeting?

