

Our purpose as a community at Grace Mid City gathered to worship God and be formed into the likeness of Christ is simply “to love God, love creation and love one another.”

To talk about our purpose is to talk about our identity. It is to talk about what it means to be a human who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit living on Earth in community with others.

In the biblical story, humans are created as ones who bear the image of God, or to say this another way, exist to show the cosmos the glory of God. We are to be a reflection of the Living God. God created humanity to rule over creation, to care for it, to nurture it, to exercise dominion over earth as God exercises dominion over all existence. We see this in Genesis 1:26–28, where God says, **“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”**

**[27] So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.**

[28] And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

And had the Fall of man not happened, there would never have been a disruption in the harmony between God, man and creation, but all three would have gone forward in relationships of knowing, trust and flourishing. Yet, with the sin of Adam and Eve, the Biblical story makes clear that humanity's relationship with God, one another and with creation has been fractured.

We see this in Genesis 3:16–19

[16] To the woman he said,

**“I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children.
Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,
but he shall rule over you.”**

**[17] And to Adam he said,
“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
'You shall not eat of it,'
cursed is the ground because of you;
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;**

**[18] thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.**

**[19] By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread,
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.”**

Whereas before, Adam and Eve were co-rulers, co-priests, working together to subdue creation, now they are set against one another. A theme that is later reinforced by the story of Cain and Abel, wherein Cain out of jealousy kills his brother.

Notice verse 17, God not only curses Adam, but God curses the ground because of Adam. No longer is their harmony between man and creation. Whereas before, creation might have willingly and eagerly yielded to man's efforts to bring order to creation, now there is a hostility and frustration between man and creation. This is a theme that Paul notes later in Romans 8:18–23,

“[18] For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. [19] For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. [20] For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope [21] that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. [22] For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. [23] And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

Therefore, the place from which we approach our passage today is from a place of a broken identity. Of an abandoned and frustrated purpose to be caretakers of creation and vessels of God's glory.

Let us now read Isaiah 62:1–5, and ponder the shape that our purpose takes when the redemption of our Lord takes hold of us:

**[1] For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet,
until her righteousness goes forth as brightness,
and her salvation as a burning torch.**

**[2] The nations shall see your righteousness,
and all the kings your glory,
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will give.**

**[3] You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.**

**[4] You shall no more be termed Forsaken,
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate,
but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her,
and your land Married;
for the LORD delights in you,
and your land shall be married.**

**[5] For as a young man marries a young woman,
so shall your sons marry you,
and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
so shall your God rejoice over you.**

Now, because we are on this side of the resurrection of Christ, we know that this passage has been fulfilled in Christ and will one day be brought to completion at his return.

Notice with me in verse 1 the relentlessness of our God to cleanse us and restore us. “I will not rest until you are made holy!” This is the heart of God burning brightly for you! God loves you so deeply! And the love of God is shown supremely for you in the crucifixion of Christ! It might have become common to you, but at the heart of the Christian faith is the truth

that God loves you. He isn't ambivalent about you, he is not a father who is cool towards you, undecided about how he feels towards you, he is a God who is passionate for you, jealous for you! Furthermore, the redemption that God brings to you is a restoring of your original identity and calling that we see in Genesis! If we recall God's words to Abraham, in Genesis 12:1-3

[1] Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. [2] And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. [3] I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Look in verses 2 & 3. Because of Christ, now God's people will truly reveal to all creation the glory of God. Now we will exercise dominion over the earth with wisdom and justice and goodness. By the way God loves us, all nations will know He is the Lord and be invited to Him.

Now zoom in on verses 4 & 5. What are the ways the restoration of God is revealed here? 1) "You shall be called, 'My Delight is in Her', shows us that the relationship between the Lord and mankind will be restored, 2) "and your land Married" reveals to us the restoration of blessing upon creation, 3) and finally as we read that "so shall your sons marry you" reveals to us that within God's Kingdom there will be harmony between mankind.

The conclusion that we draw from this passage is that God's salvation of mankind and creation is a restoration of the harmony and delight that existed before the fall of mankind. Now, the shape that this restoration takes is expressed in us as the purpose of our lives. This purpose is threefold:

1. You and I have been created to delight in God and to be delighted in by God.
2. You and I have been created to be in mutual and reciprocal relationships of being known and delighted in by one another.
3. You and I have been created to delight in and care for the material world.

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Like the banks of a river, let this purpose give shape to your life. Let the contours of God's design be the mold that you find your identity in. Slowly and prayerful contemplate the purpose that God has for humanity. Let the awareness that God's grand design for all of creation is harmony and unity shape your own sense of calling.

Here are some reflection questions for you:

What do you understand your purpose in God's story to be?

How can you think of your work/daily activity as living out the reconciliation of God, uniting heavens and earth through_____ (medicine, economics, art, finance, teaching, engineering, retired, unemployed, disabled)?

In what ways is your life at odds with God, people and creation? How can you pivot towards peace with God, others, and creation?

What hurts are you carrying that you need God and others to listen to you about? Who can you talk to about what burdens you are carrying?