

The image features a dark teal background with a subtle pattern of white specks, resembling a starry night sky. In the center, there are silhouettes of a family: a man, a woman, and two children. The man is on the right, holding the hand of a small child. The woman is on the left, holding a baby. The overall mood is serene and intimate.

# ESSENTIAL RELATIONSHIPS

# DAY ONE

Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him.” The Lord God had formed out of the ground every wild animal and every bird of the sky and brought each to the man to see what he would call it. And whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the livestock, to the birds of the sky, and to every wild animal; but for the man no helper was found corresponding to him. Genesis 2:18-20

Relationally, humanity is much more complex than merely existing in a relationship to God. God exists in relationship within the Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. One common divine nature. Three distinct and specific persons. And Genesis 1 and 2 tell us that God created us in His image. This means that, like God, we were also created to function within three essential relationships.

First and foremost, we were created to be in a right relationship with the Creator. God created us to be with Him, and to relate rightly to Him by existing in a sinless relationship with Him. Our relationship with God is to supersede every other relationship.

We were also created for community. God says that if our only relationship is with Him, then we are alone. And this is not good. God created us to be in right relationships with other human beings also. First of importance in these relationships is that of our spouses and families, followed by our church families. In Genesis 2, Paul expands on this idea of “one-fleshness” by expanding it to the church in Ephesians.

Additionally, we were created to be in a right relationship with creation. When God brought the animals to Adam to be named, not one corresponded to him the way Eve would. However, there is still something in our relationship with creation that resonates within us.

Now, before you begin praying for me, concerned that I’ve turned into some tree-hugging, animal rights activist, let’s make it clear. God created us to be in dominion over animals, successfully ruling over them responsibly and with integrity. Treating this relationship in a God-honoring way is part of what makes us human.

## DAY ONE (CONTINTUED)

It also makes us less alone. In God's mind, if you are not in relationship with any of His creation besides people, then you are alone. Animals were created to be a blessing to us, not just through food, but also as companionship to help reduce our aloneness. Having a relationship with this creation is also a part of our relationship with God.

However, people can easily distort this relationship by using animals as a solution to their aloneness. They can become reclusive, replacing relationships to people with relationships to animal as they elevate their cats or dogs above people.

In my house growing up, I had two older brothers. But when one considered all the creatures depending on my mom for care, I was clearly fourth in importance to her. My oldest brother Kurt was most important, followed by the two dogs, Heidi and Lady. I was in fourth place and in a distant fifth place was my older brother, Kyle. That was simply the way it was. Like many others, my mom distorted the importance of those relationships.

We have a dog named Belle. Belle, like so many other pets, provides joy, love, and warmth for our home. Although Belle diminishes the negativity of aloneness, she does not solve our aloneness problem. Those solutions are found in each other in our home. When I exist in right relationships to other family members, I experience the most appropriate way to ease the pain of the aloneness. This is the way that honors God.

Animals and pets can lessen the pain of aloneness, but they cannot cure it. Love your pets. Pamper them from time to time. Give your dogs some treats. Occasionally turn the security cameras off so your cats can continue their plotting to overthrow your house. But do not assume that your pets can fully satisfy the essential relationship needs in any way, shape, form or fashion. God functions in the Trinity and we, being created in the image of God, should function in all three essential relationships also.

# DAY TWO

...the ground is cursed because of you. You will eat from it by means of painful labor all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. You will eat bread by the sweat of your brow until you return to the ground, since you were taken from it. For you are dust, and you will return to dust.” – Genesis 3:17-19

Let everything that breathes praise the Lord. Hallelujah! – Psalm 150:6

Only human beings were created in the image of God. But if a believer intends to live in a right relationship with God, that means a believer must in turn relate kindly, responsibly and gently to nature, creation and animals.

Before the Fall (that moment when sin entered the world through the rebellion of humans against God), people had dominion over all. We were to rule over creation, including animals, with a sense of compassion, gentleness and responsibility. And for a time, humans did just that. Adam lived in the garden in a perfect relationship with God and with Eve and with creation. But when sin entered the world, humans fell from that blessed state that they were created for.

God had commanded where they could and could not eat, but humans decided to disregard His command. From that point forward, sin distorted and perverted everything, not just the human soul. Genesis tells us that the curse of our sin flows out, affecting everything. After the Fall, relationships once characterized by harmony were now characterized by enmity: enmity between people, enmity between people and the Earth and its creatures, and enmity between people and God.



## DAY TWO (CONTINUED)

Enmity is strife, conflict, hostility. Those words now define the three relationships we have. Our first foundational relationship with God that was marked by obedience is now marked by disobedience. The second foundational relationship that was supposed to be characterized by oneness is now characterized by separation, shame and the actions meant to conceal and cover that shame. The third foundational relationship which was to be characterized by our ruling over the earth is now characterized by enmity and conflict.

The innocent earth found in Genesis 3:17, is now cursed. Humans who were intended to rule and fill the earth have distorted it through sin. After sin changed our souls, the ruling and filling was replaced with thorns, thistles and painful work. We now eat plants through our hard work. We eat bread by the sweat of our brow. We are cursed to eke out a living from the earth and, because of our Fall, the earth is fighting us back tooth and nail at every turn. Creation rebels against us, objecting to the rule we were created to have.

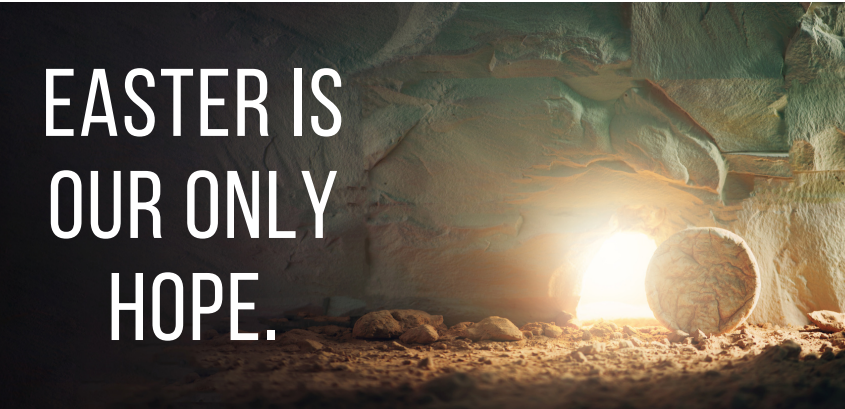
Toil, sweat and pain are NOT words that reveal harmony between man and creation. Even your precious pet will fight you. My dog growls at us every time she goes near her food bowl. Hornets sting us when we are enjoying a cool afternoon on the back porch. Deer eat all the flowers you work hard to grow. Your cat is secretly selling your personal information to the Russians. The earth, including animals, is at enmity with people.

So, who is truly ruling who now? Genesis 3 reminds us that we were initially created from the earth to rule over it, but death returns us to the dust. If I go back in, back under the dirt, am I on top in that situation? Burial upon death is the ultimate distortion from our sin, a reversal of our God-given origin story. We can forget that reversal means creation now needs redemption too. The psalmists are clear - God's care covers all creatures. All creatures, everything that lives and breathes, will one day offer praise, honor, glory, and worship to the Lord. One day.

## DAY TWO (CONTINTUED)

As Christians, it is our responsibility to work to reverse the curse, even though we realize that it can only be truly reversed by Jesus. Science is our attempt to restore things back to what they were created for. But placing all hope in science is a distorted, twisted hope. The ultimate redemption of the world will not be discovered in a lab. Nor is the lab a new temple. The scientist is not a new priest. We cure disease and illness only to be flattened by a single virus. Science can provide a reasonable hope that some things may improve, but science is not our ultimate hope.

Easter is our only hope. Every scientist will ultimately fail at discovering a reversal to the curse. Burial is everyone's final destiny. Easter was the exception. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the reversal of his burial. It is the reversal of the curse of sin. Jesus comes back out of the ground to ultimately rule over the earth. His resurrection fulfilled the Bible's oldest prophecy from Genesis 3 by reversing the curse of sin. His resurrection redeems the toil and pain we experience in life once and for all time. His death and resurrection forgive the sin that cursed us. His resurrection can finally heal our hearts, our souls, our minds and, one day, our bodies.



**EASTER IS  
OUR ONLY  
HOPE.**

The enmity between people and God could only be removed ultimately by the sacrificial atonement of Jesus Christ. The relational enmity will only be removed when Jesus returns a second time in glory. One day Jesus will come back as our Risen Savior and Lord. Then every creature that breathes will praise him and respond rightly to him. Every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Until then, this tension between people and creation will remain.

# DAY THREE



“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” – John 11:25-26

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; in all your ways know him, and he will make your paths straight. – Proverbs 3:5-6

Everything is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and he has committed the message of reconciliation to us. – 2 Corinthians 5:18-19

Jesus gives himself a unique name and identity here. He is the resurrection and He is life. We look back Genesis 1-3 to have a clearer picture of what that means:

**God warned Adam and Eve that eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil meant that they would die in Genesis 2:17. The enemy came to them in the form of a serpent and told them that God was a liar. He planted seeds of doubt as to the truthfulness of God’s words. He told them that they would not die, rather they would become like God.**

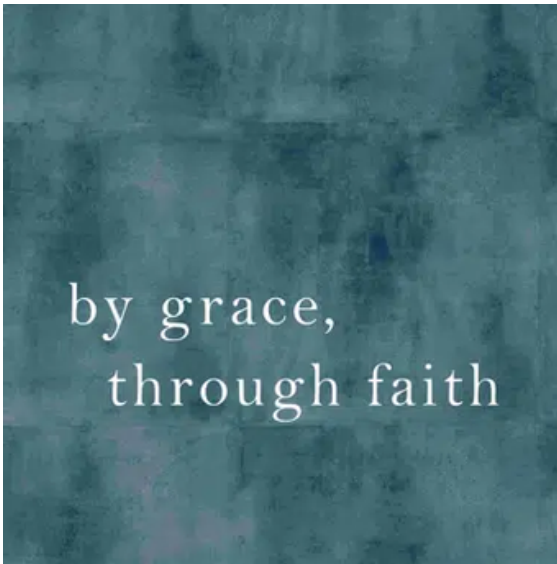
(GENESIS 3:4-5)

They listened and believed the lies of the enemy as they ate. If humans had believed the words of God, they would have lived, and the earth would not feel the effects of the curse. The life to enjoy in God’s creation would be one marked with abundance and be experienced everlastingly. Those are the markers that describe life in God’s presence: abundant and forever.

## DAY THREE (CONTINTUED)

Rather, they listened to the lies and trusted their own understanding and it opened the world to the curse of sin. Sin brought with it a curse filled with pain, creating enmity between people and God, enmity between people, and enmity between people and creation. Relationships that were once marked by abundance and forever are now marked by pain and enmity.

Through Jesus Christ, God deals with the curse, the pain and the conflict that now characterizes our relationships. Jesus died for our curse. Jesus suffered our pain. Jesus bore the brunt of that enmity.



If Jesus has brought you life by grace through faith, you then have the obligation to take part in his ministry of reconciliation. You are to share the good news of the Gospel, providing the hope of that great exchange for everyone. Everyone can trade the curse of their sin for the abundant and forever life by receiving salvation and believing in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.



# DAY FOUR



“Consider the birds of the sky: They don’t sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you worth more than they?” – Matthew 6:26

“Aren’t five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God’s sight. Indeed, the hairs of your head are all counted. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” – Luke 12:6-7

This is what the Lord says:

“Heaven is my throne,

and earth is my footstool.

Where could you possibly build a house for me?

And where would my resting place be?

My hand made all these things,

and so they all came into being...” – Isaiah 66:1-2a

This is just a brief reminder of some of the attributes of God that we see in these verses concerning the animal kingdom. In these two passages, Jesus lets people know that God, in his transcendence, sovereignty and wisdom, is aware of each animal and extends his care to even them.

Jesus asks a rhetorical question that helps redirect our thoughts from the fears and anxieties back to his divine transcendence and imminence. God transcends earthly wisdom. In his address to the Areopagus in Athens, Paul tells the Athenians listening that God does not live in hand-built temples, nor is he dependent upon being served by human hands. God is transcendent and possesses divine aseity. He is in need of nothing and nobody. Yet, he loves and cares for his creation and desires that we might love and serve him in response to his benevolent providence and compassion.

God takes care of birds and God is taking care of you, too. He is completely aware of your struggles today. He knows the issues facing you and the obstacles in front of you. He knows the conflicts between you and others. He knows the doubts and the fears and the anxiety you feel right now. You are worth more to God than you could ever realize. Do not be afraid. Take time to release that fear and anxiety to Him in prayer and ask for the ability and wisdom to trust and to believe.

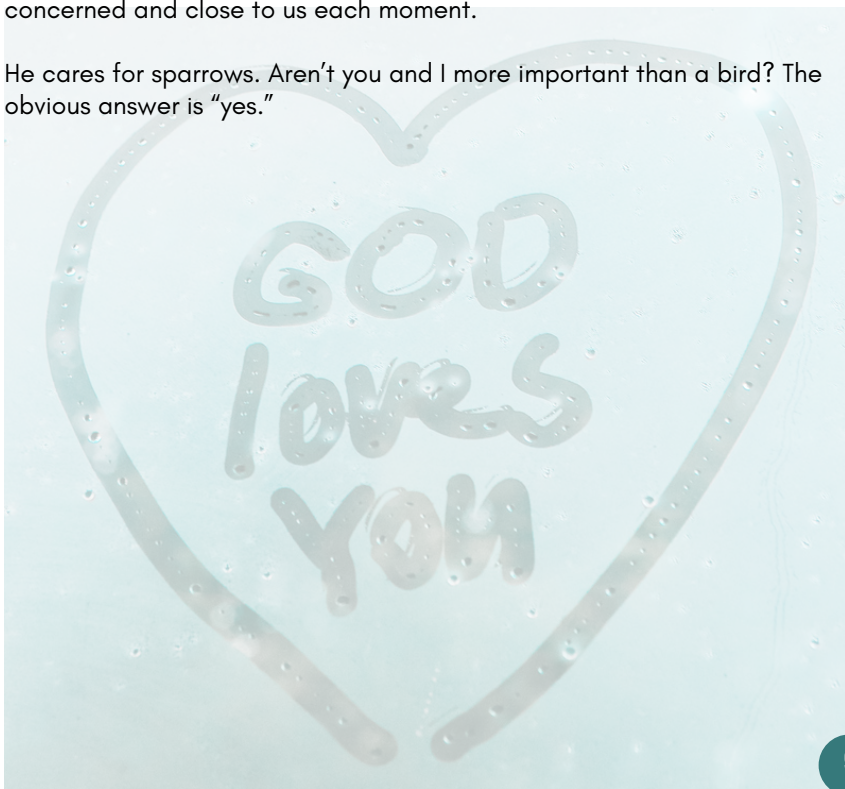
## DAY FOUR (CONTINTUED)

God transcends all our mess here, yet He is imminently close to us. He maintains close association with his and is directly interacting with his creation, from sparrows to you and me. He is transcendent, imminent, and good.

God is concerned with each creature; He cares for and provides for them. We are then tasked with living lives of God-honoring stewardship. God has provided for us and He cares for us. He is above our issues and yet is right there in it with us, ready to lift our heavy and wearied heads.

The earth is like a footstool to God. He created this place and all that is in it and, as our Creator, he is imminent and interested in our lives. He cared so deeply for us that He sent Jesus to reconcile us back to Himself. He is not some cosmic watchmaker who wound up the world, spun it out in motion and then turned his back and went on vacation. He is involved, concerned and close to us each moment.

He cares for sparrows. Aren't you and I more important than a bird? The obvious answer is "yes."



# DAY FIVE

How countless are your works, Lord!  
In wisdom you have made them all;  
the earth is full of your creatures.

Here is the sea, vast and wide,  
teeming with creatures beyond number -  
living things both large and small.

There the ships move about,  
and Leviathan, which you formed to  
play there.

All of them wait for you  
To give them their food at the right time.

When you give it to them,  
They gather it;  
when you open your hand,  
they are satisfied with good things.

When you hide your face,  
they are terrified;  
when you take away their breath,  
they die and return to the dust.  
When you send your breath,  
They are created,  
and you renew the surface of the ground.  
- Psalm 104:24-30

The wolf will dwell with the lamb,  
and the leopard will lie down with the goat.  
The calf, the young lion, and the fattened calf will be together,  
and a child will lead them.

The cow and the bear will graze, their young ones will lie down together,  
and the lion will eat straw like cattle.

An infant will play beside the cobra's pit,  
And a toddler will put his hand into a snake's den.

They will not harm or destroy each other  
on my entire holy mountain  
for the land will be as full  
of the knowledge of the Lord  
as the sea is filled with water.

- Isaiah 11:6-9

## DAY FIVE (CONTINTUED)

This week we focused on God's creation and the essential relationship we have with it. We started off thinking about our furry and four-legged family members. We saw how they bring companionship and happiness into our lives, but they can't cure the pain of aloneness. It is clear in the scriptures that all animals matter to God and that He lovingly cares for them all. Matthew 6:26 says He feeds the birds and Luke 12:6 tells us that animals are not forgotten by God. God expects us to reflect Him in how we show care and compassion in our treatment of God's creation. But what happens at the heartbreaking time of when we lose our pets?



Just as animals are an important part of God's work and creation here and now, there is good reason to believe that animals will be part of the age that is still to come when Jesus returns. After Noah's Flood, the covenant God made to never flood the world again was not only made with humans. Genesis 9:9-10 tells us that God made that promise to every living creature. God's ultimate will and purpose is to renew everything (Matthew 19:28). What we see around us will be restored and renewed. Including animals.

## DAY FIVE (CONTINTUED)

Isaiah speaks of that original created order in Genesis 1 and 2 returning when Jesus finishes his salvific work. Wolves will be sitting with lambs in harmony. Predators and prey will exist without any issues. The pecking order, the food chain, will end. Carnivorous animals will become herbivores. All creation looks forward to a day when, as the Apostle Paul put it, it will be set free from the curse and decay of sin (Romans 8:21). On that day, all creatures in heaven and on earth, under the earth and in the oceans will be praising God. (Revelation 5:13)

That popular verse in Isaiah 11 that refers to “a child leading them” speaks to the sinless harmony that creation will be restored to when humans will be in dominion over animals. The curse of sin will be lifted and even a small human toddler will walk in dominion over animals. This vision of the future painted by scripture is the redemption of God’s people and creation. Scripture tells us that God is not erasing everything and starting over from scratch. There will be renewal, redemption, restoration, and things remade into glory.

Now, a popular question I get asked is “Will my dog go to heaven?” Will God raise some or all animals to life? Sorry to say, I just do not know. The Bible does not give a definitive answer. What is clear is that animals will play a part of the new earth to come in glory. That is something we can believe with certainty.

Something else I know for certain. We can only enjoy eternity with God if we trust in Christ here before we die or before he returns. It would be tragic if animals enjoyed the new world and we ourselves did not.