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Scripture: Genesis 1-3, In The Beginning

This a bamboo shoot. Are you familiar with bamboo? We use it for all sorts of things. In the construction of homes, buildings and even roads, in medicine, paper products, clothing, accessories, even for food.

In his book, *First Things First*, author Steven Covey points out that like any plant, the growth of the Chinese Bamboo Tree (actually a grass) requires nurturing through water, fertile soil, and sunshine. But in its first year that a farmer plants the bamboo, there are no visible signs of growth in spite of providing all of these things. In the second year (again), there is no growth above the soil. The third, fourth year...still show no signs of anything happening.

Now you can imagine that if you were a bamboo farmer and year after year, your water it, tend to it, ensure it gets enough sunshine and you see no signs of growth, you would want to give up, wouldn't you? Your patience would be tested, you would begin to doubt your efforts, and contemplate quitting. After four years of nothing to show for all of your time and energy. Time to move on, right!? But then finally in the fifth year – something amazing happens...

The Chinese Bamboo Tree grows 80 feet tall in just six weeks! It grows right before your eyes.

But think for a moment, does the Chinese Bamboo Tree really grow 80 feet in six weeks? Does its seed lie dormant for four years only to have a sudden flurry of growth in the fifth year? Well, that is the way it may appear, but in reality, for the first four years, the tree had been growing underground, creating an expansive root system strong enough to support its potential for outward growth in the fifth

year and beyond? Had the tree not developed a strong unseen foundation it could not have sustained the heights to which it grew and be so useful.

And I think, the same principle is true for people.

It takes time, energy and effort to work towards worthwhile goals. Even if you don't see any results at first, by staying diligent, you are building a strong internal foundation which helps you to stay rooted and overcome adversity and other challenges that may come your way.

I think of those of you who are students beginning a new school year. There may be this temptation to just get out in the world and start making money now. But what you are doing with your school is building a foundation that will enable you to flourish in the future. Oh, it may seem slow or monotonous at times, but don't uproot too soon, stay patience and committed to the task at hand and you will reap the rewards soon enough.

The same can be said for our spiritual journeys. It takes time and effort to build a solid foundation that is rooted in Christ. Sometimes we may grow frustrated because we see little or no outward growth but by staying committed to our faith journey, we construct a solid base to grow and to withstand whatever the world throws our way. If you want to grow high, your first have to grow deep.

This is what our kick off series for this new season, 2018-19 at North Park is all about. Foundations. It is about those core tenets of our faith that serve as a solid foundation on which to build our lives. Over the next five weeks, we will be opening scripture

and discussing these key foundation pillars of our faith.

Let me just say a couple of things about scripture, the bible. What we do around here is important, we gather in community, we encourage and support one another, we reach out to our neighbourhood with practical gestures of help. It is all well and good.

But what distinguishes us from any other service club in London that probably also does all of those things, is, that we do it in the name of Jesus. And this is our text book. This is the book that reveals Jesus and his plan for our lives so we have to go to it often, every day, to keep our foundation strong in him.

So, if you are ready to launch into a new season, I invite you to open your bibles with me and we are going to start, in the beginning. Literally.

Genesis 1:1

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis, as its name implies, is the book of beginnings and it starts with God creating, everything.

And maybe that is our first Foundational point.

We believe that the origin of all creation is from God, the creator and it exists by his power. The sun, the moon, the stars, the birds, the fish, even the skunks, everything was made by God. Now that doesn't mean that evolution is a dirty word in the Christian world, things evolve for sure. Place a picture of me at age 19 beside one of me today, you will see, I have definitely evolved. But everything gets its origin from God.

Exactly how he created everything, well that is where the debates come in, but the fact remains, God took a dark, watery chaos and turns it into a beautiful garden where humanity could flourish.

His power and majesty are revealed in three simple words, *Then God said*. These three words are repeated nine times in

Genesis 1

Verse 3, Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light

Verse 6, Then God said, "Let there be a space between the waters,

Verse 9, Then God said, "Let the waters beneath the sky flow together

On and on it goes. *Then God Said*. God spoke the word and it was done. And did you notice the other phrase that accompanies everything that God creates? Anyone knows what it is? *It was good. Then God said....it was good.*

These are profound words that may get a little lost in translation. For us, *it was good*, may indicate that something is adequate. Paul's message today was good, not great, not excellent, not poor, it was good, passable.

This past Friday, I bit the bullet and purchased a TV and internet bundle from Bell.

We haven't had cable TV for a while but this year, I wanted to ensure that I catch all the Maple Leaf games and of course, the Stanley Cup parade in Toronto in June. Now when it came to the bundles, I had a choice. I could get the good, the better or the best bundle package. I opted for good. It has the basics. It is not the better or the best, it is just good, it's adequate for our viewing needs.

Now if we take that understanding of good into what God is implying, we will have totally missed the point. When God created light, he didn't tinker with its exact location, a little left, a little right, like Carolyn and I hanging a picture in our living room. A little left, a little right, and then finally out of exasperation say, "ahh, it's good. It'll do!"

These words from God uttered 7 times in Genesis 1, *it was good*, means that God's plan is perfect. His power and wisdom are perfect, and that God's authority is the only source by which He can accomplish the perfection. It was good.

Once he had created the setting, God created the first people. They were both individuals but they are

also representative. Adam comes from the Hebrew word for humanity and Eve comes from the Hebrew word for life. Adam and Eve, humanity and life. Let's look at how humanity was created because this is foundational to our faith.

Genesis 1:26-27

Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground." 27 So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Now we need to pause because there is so much crammed into these few verses. First of all, did you notice, the use of the plural, *Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us.* Although there is some debate amongst scholars, Trinitarian Christians believe this line is referring to God as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The three in one and that is why it is plural. Jesus doesn't make his debut in the New Testament. He was there in the beginning.

But it is Genesis 1:27, I want to pay particular attention to.

Genesis 1:27

*So God created human beings in his own image.
In the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.*

I almost get goosebumps every time I read this passage. Can you imagine? Humanity, we were created in the image of God. It is what sets us apart from everything else God created. Different from the plants, the flowers, the animals. It says in,

Genesis 2:7

Then the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person.

When God made Adam, it is like he got down in the dirt and formed, (the word formed here means to mold or to shape, like a potter) the shape of a

human body out of the clay of the earth and then breathed his own life into the man's nostrils and "man became a living soul". The very spirit of God through his breath lives in humanity. That is what makes us different than anything else he created.

I know you love your pet cat or dog, or hamster and they too are a creation of God, but no matter how much you think they are a person or you treat them like a person, they aren't. There is a difference, between animals and humanity. Do you see that?

We have God's breathe in us and we are made in his image. What does that mean? Is what is staring back at us, when we look in a mirror what God looks like? For His sake, I hope not, at least in my case, especially first thing in the morning. Some of you may have a God complex and think God looks like you or you look like God but that is not the idea here. To be made in the image of God means that we were created to reflect God's glory to the world.

Think of like we are walking disco balls. When the light of God hits us, then we shimmer, shine and glitter the creativity, goodness and character of our creator into the world by the way that we live through him. The way we love, extend kindness, demonstrate patience, compassion, obedience and faithfulness. But to be an image bearer also means that humanity was to reflect the praises of creation back to God, the creator. So, we were to be a type of two-way mirror, reflecting praises and glory back and forth between creator and creation. What a privileged position for us.

After God created Adam, he placed him in a setting designed specifically for him, the Garden of Eden. He had everything he wanted, everything he needed. God walked and talked with Adam, enjoying the creation he had made. But he soon realized that although man was surrounded by living creatures, he was alone. There was no one like him.

Genesis 2:18

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him."

Remember how God said, *it was good, it was good, it was good.* But here He says, *It is not good.* It was the first time God said that about His creation and

he is talking about man's loneliness, it was not good. Adam needed another person. To love, to talk to, to work with, to rule over creation with, to be God's image bearer with. He needed a helper that corresponded to him.

Once again, we have to be careful of the word helper in this text. We could interpret it to mean someone who is subservient, like an assistant but that is not the nuance in this passage. A helper here means someone who brings another to fulfillment. Without the woman, Adam could not reach the full potential that God had in mind for him. He couldn't be fruitful and multiply but it means more than that.

When I first meet with an engaged couple who wants me to marry them, I get them to tell me a bit about themselves and their relationship. How they met, how long they have been dating, how the marriage proposal took place. All great and entertaining information and then I usually ask the couple a question. Do each of them know their purpose in their marriage?

If you are married here today and I asked you that question, would you know the answer? What is your purpose in your marriage? The answer lies in this text. You are to be a helper to your mate, husbands to wives and wives to husbands. Through God's help, you are to bring each other to fulfillment. God can use you to allow your spouse to be all that they can be. You are to be each other's greatest cheerleader. But to truly do that, God has to be at the centre of your relationship. If you are married here today, is your spouse your greatest cheerleader? Someone that brings out the best in you? Is God using them to help you become all that He wants you to be? If not, you need to talk about it and invite God into it.

Once God saw Adam's need and his helplessness, He provided a person who meshed with him and yet was also different from him. She could be his helper because she was a person, like him, a special creation from the hand of God but also different in a way that completed him.

If you are single or divorced here today, this may be a painful subject. In the perfect world God created, His intent was that no one would be lonely. Everyone would have a mate, to fulfill them through

God. But in the fallen condition of our world, some of you are lonely. I encourage you to turn to God, turn to Jesus. He will fulfill you and complete you.

The creation of Eve is given in Genesis 2:21-25. It says,

Genesis 2:21-25

So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the LORD God took out one of the man's ribs and closed up the opening.²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man.²³ "At last!" the man exclaimed. "This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken from 'man.'"²⁴ This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.²⁵ Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame.

When God brought Eve to Adam, he was overjoyed. At last! That is my expression every time Carolyn walks in the door, *at last!* Adam and Eve were one flesh. Each supplied what the other lacked. They were both naked and felt no shame. At this point, we maybe try to stifle a nervous giggle, *they were naked....and felt no shame.* But do we have any idea what this meant?

When Adam and Eve were first created there was openness, vulnerability, honesty, love and communication flowing freely between them. There were no walls, no fears, no body shaming concerns, no self-esteem issues or insecurities about each other's worth or value. Their sexuality was freely enjoyed without any taint of shame or guilt. They lived in a state of untested innocence.

This was the Garden of Eden. Paradise, in the beginning. A perfect environment, with food, protection and provision and a committed and permanent marriage between Adam and Eve. They had a deep relationship with God who called them to be fruitful and multiply, care for and rule over the rest of creation and be His image bearers to all that he created.

What a wonderful picture. Doesn't that sound idyllic? Won't it be amazing if we could just leave it there, end the bible at Genesis chapter 2? It is

important for us to understand that this picture of creation is a foundational pillar for us at North Park. It is why we were created and how we were created. It is important for us to linger here for a moment. To fully understand our creation story because it makes the next part of the narrative much more poignant.

Everyone okay with Genesis 1&2? The Creation account?

So, God's vision was to be with humanity in a beautiful garden of his creation. The triune God, desires to do life with humanity. Isn't that amazing? The Almighty God wants to be in relationship with us. That is what matters most to him. Relationship. And so it would only make sense that God would want to ensure that Adam and Eve embrace that same vision and passion as well. That they too, desired to be in relationship with him.

Have you ever had feelings towards someone and weren't sure whether they felt the same way? That's awkward isn't it? So what do you do? Put out little feelers, little tests to determine whether they like you as a friend or maybe more. In elementary school, you get a friend to ask a friend to ask this person whether they like you, right?

Way back in the dark ages when I was a teenager, when you thought you had a connection with someone, maybe after spending a few Friday nights at the roller rink, skating to disco music. Oh you laugh, but there is nothing like the Bee Gees' *Stayin' Alive* to create that romantic vibe. Or for those who were church goers, perhaps it was a youth group outing to an Amy Grant or Keith Green concert and you meet that certain someone and your heart starts skipping a beat and you can't stop thinking of them. We used to test the waters to see if the feeling was mutual by asking that person a question. Does anyone know what that question was? "*Will you go with me?*". If the person responds, "*go with you where?*" Then the feeling probably wasn't mutual but if they responded, "*yes*" it meant that you were now in an exclusive relationship.

God desires to be in relationship with humanity but does not force the issue. God instilled something deep within our DNA that is different from the rest of creation. God gave humanity the freedom to

choose. To make a decision to be in relationship with him. In the garden, God gave Adam and Eve a way to declare if they trusted him completely. He did it by placing two trees in the middle of the garden – The Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. He gives them only one instruction. Do not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. All other trees, go for it. It was a test.

If they obey God, it will signify to him that they trust him and embrace his vision of what it means to do life together in relationship. But if they disobey, they would be declaring to God that they are rejecting his vision. Do you see that?

They would be rebelling against his instructions. And instead choosing to go out on their own believing they know what is best for their lives rather than the creator of life. Does that make sense?

See, up until this point, God was the one that defined what was good. His creation, the sky, water, land, humanity, *It was good, it was good, it was good*, and he was the one defining what was not good. *It was not good* for man to be alone.

But now this tree situation represents the freedom to choose. Will Adam and Eve trust God's definition of good and evil or will they seize the opportunity to define it for themselves? What will they do?

I think we all know what happened, don't we? They both ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The one tree God commanded them not to touch.

With that one seemingly harmless gesture of plucking the fruit and taking a bite, they proclaimed their desire to call the shots themselves. To live independent of God. At that moment, something changed in their nature.

Sin was now running through their bloodstream. This is the core biblical definition of Sin. It is the desire to call the shots ourselves. It is an inward turn of the heart away from God that says, I am going to do what is good and profitable for myself at the expense of what is good and profitable for everyone else. It is rebellion towards God.

But, you and I know that feeling well, don't we? That internal battle between what is good and what is evil. We face it every day. It is something that we all deal with and the origin goes all the way back to the garden. Adam and Eve defined their relationship with God by disobeying him and going their own way. Evil entered their lives. The hard truth is that humanity is horrible at defining what is good and what is evil apart from God. If you don't believe me, read the paper, watch the news or log onto social media. Or simply look back on some of the life decisions you have made apart from God.

Isn't it interesting the first thing that happens after Adam and Eve bite into the fruit and eat from the tree that God told them not to. Look at,

Genesis 3:7

At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

The Bible says the first thing they did after disobeying God was to cover themselves. Why? Didn't it say just before this in?

Genesis 2:25

Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame.

Why the change? It's sin. This warring internal battle of good and evil. Shame has now come to humanity. Now Adam and Eve are looking at each other, and instead of having just warm and cuddly thoughts about each other, now an evil thought emerges. *Have you been putting on some weight?* For the first time Adam and Eve feel shame and they feel vulnerable. They cover up to protect themselves from the other person, and we, humanity have been in this defensive mode ever since. Protecting ourselves. Looking out for our own needs and desires. It has lingered with us since the garden.

The Bible tells us that Adam and Eve's decision to disobey God in the Garden of Eden had consequences. The Lord curses the serpent that tempted Eve to forever crawl on its belly and eat dust. To the woman he increases her pain in childbirth. Which some of you have experienced firsthand. It is not pleasant, at least that has been my

observation the few times I have witnessed my wife giving birth. It is a tad uncomfortable.

As you know, my oldest daughter is pregnant with her first child, due in November. We were with them last weekend, everyone was talking about how great she looked with her tummy bulging (and she does look great) and there was excited chatter about soon being able to hold this bundle of joy.

But there was a brief moment when I looked at her and thought, *oh you naïve soul. That thing has to come out! Before you get the joy of holding that little one, that thing has to come out.*

What is that passage?

Psalm 30:5

Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning. Oh yeah.

I know what you are thinking, Paul, you are such a kill joy, no I am a realist. Someone has to tell it like it is. Pain in child birth was one of the repercussions of sin in the Garden of Eden. And man was not let off the hook. God condemned him to toil and labour over the land. Instead of the fertile soil bursting with fruit and vegetables like in the garden, Adam would have to work at getting food from a more hostile earth. But perhaps the greatest consequence of all, God banished Adam and Eve from the garden. From the place of relationship and community with Him. Sin, always has consequences. Some of you are living with those even now.

From the moment that Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command to not eat from the tree, everything changed. They changed, their world changed and their destiny changed. In fact, Genesis 3:8 says after they ate from the tree, when they heard God approaching, Adam and Eve ran! They hid from him. They were now afraid of their loving creator, the one that before sin, they have walked with and communed with daily, they now were hiding from. Their loss of relationship with God meant spiritual death. Remember, God said if you eat from the tree you will surely die. They did, spiritually. They were now separated from God.

This is another foundational pillar in which we believe. Sin separates us from God. And it separates us from the amazing full and abundant life that he

created us for. We can no longer be his image bearers because the mirror, us, is now smudged. Smeared. Because of sin, humanity now reflects off a distorted image. If you walk out these doors, down the hallway towards the children's ministry, you will come upon a mirror on the right about halfway down the hall. Bend down and look into it. Because of its shape and contours, you get a distorted imagine. That is what sin does to us. It separates us from God and it distorts his image in us and obstructs us from living the absolute best life he has for us.

What a miserable predicament Adam and Eve find themselves in. They have blown it big time, not only for themselves but because of their actions, all of humanity has inherited this sinful nature and borne the consequences. That is like the whole class having to stay after school for a detention because one or two people were messing around. It doesn't seem fair. But just when it seems like this is humanity's darkest hour, we see a glimmer of hope. Did you notice that after Adam and Eve sinned, God came looking for them, he initiated the search?

Genesis 3:8-9

When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the LORD God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the LORD God among the trees. ⁹ Then the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

Where are you? God pursues us. Not matter how much we reject him, disobey him, deny him. He is a God that pursues. Oh, he won't force us into a relationship with him, he desires that we choose that for ourselves, but he is there. Right there for whenever we are ready to turn from our own way of doing things and turn back to him. Have you turned to God? Perhaps you sit here today and feel that you have done something too big, too nasty, too unforgiveable, that it has disqualified you from being in relationship with Him, No. He is a God that pursues. He is there. Turn to Him and receive His love and forgiveness today.

The second glimmer of hope comes from a rather brief verse hidden near the end of Genesis chapter 3. One that perhaps you have never really noticed before but it is important.

Remember what happened immediately after Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? They sewed fig leaves to cover up their shame. But in Genesis 3:21, God does something different.

Genesis 3:21

And the LORD God made clothing from animal skins for Adam and his wife.

See at this point, fig leaves were no longer adequate. God replaced the leaves with the skin of animals to cover their shame. How did he get them? Something needed to die. Foreshadowing that the solution to covering humanity's sin and restoring us back in relationship with God would have to involve the shedding of blood, something or someone had to die as a substitution for our sin. Do you see where this is going? It is headed directly to... Jesus, God's own Son, died on the cross for Adam and Eve and all generations born after them. But that foundational pillar of our faith, I will save for next week.

Foundations. What do we believe? At North Park, we believe, that God is the creator of the heavens and the earth and of humanity and it was good. We believe that God formed man out of the dust of the earth and breathed his life into him. God's spirit lives in us.

We believe God made women from man and gave her to the man as a help mate and together they were made in the image of God and their life purpose was to live abundantly and to rule over creation and be image bearers, reflecting God's glory to creation and the praises of creation back to God.

And we believe that because of disobedience, Sin, humanity became separated from God. His image in us is marred and there is nothing that we can do on our own to repair this chasm.

But, we believe that God has provided a solution, that he does pursue us, to bring us back to him and restore our relationship with him. The solution is Jesus. That is what we will talk about in the days ahead.

Is this what you believe? Does all that we talked about today form the foundation of your life? If so, that is what allows us to put down solid roots so that whatever the world throws our way, we can not only withstand it, but we can thrive and flourish with our hearts and lives set on Him.

Amen? Amen. Let's Pray

Points to Ponder

Foundations ~ We Believe What We Believe

Genesis 1-3

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. What are some of the foundation values that dictate the way that you live your life? Share a few with your group and discuss the way your day to day actions are prompted by these values.
2. What questions are stirred in you by the concept that God is the creator of everything? What are some of the tensions of this core foundational pillar and some of the beliefs of the world?
3. Humanity was created in the image of God and is to reflect His glory to the world and the praises of creation back to God. What does this look like in your daily life and the places that you go? What does it mean to be the image bearer of God in your circle of influence?
4. If you are married, talk about what it means to be a help mate to your spouse. What does it mean to fulfill the other person? Can you do that apart from God being at the centre of your relationship? If you are single, discuss whether someone else, can play that role in your life.
5. What is your understanding of sin? Where have you seen sin separate you from God?
6. God pursues us, no matter how far we have drifted from Him. Can you think of a time in your past, when looking back, you know that God pursued you? What caused you to turn back to him?

Prayer and Action Item

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. Pray specifically for one another that this series on Foundations would strengthened your faith and your relationship with Jesus.