

**Marriage Survey** – This is an opportunity to raise awareness and engagement in our marriage resources because we value healthy, growing marriages.

When was the last time you investigated your marriage? How well would you be able to identify what is working well and what could use some improvement? If you'd like help in identifying your strengths and ways to grow your marriage, take the free marriage assessment. [CCCOMaha.info](http://CCCOMaha.info)

[The Marriage Assessment - Focus on the Family](#)

Every couple can engage in the Marriage Assessment designed to identify strengths and potential growth opportunities based on 10 essential marriage traits. It takes 7-10 minutes to complete and is free.

Couples that would like to receive more information on the growth opportunities can visit one of the marriage groups beginning this fall.

### Sermon

I want to start today with a scripture from Jeremiah. This was written to the exiles in Babylon from Jeremiah himself when they asked “How should we interact with the Babylonians, now that they have captured and exported us?”

Introduction: Jeremiah 29 – <sup>4</sup>This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: <sup>5</sup>“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. <sup>6</sup>Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. <sup>7</sup>Also, seek the **SHALOM** and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

### MAP!

seek the good of the CITY... Flourishing is from God, through us and FOR all... If you are in exile, then grow where you are planted. Multiply... grow great kids. Seek SHALOM and prosperity for the city. This is highly instructive for people like us who are NOT in exile. Because if, when in exile, you are to seek the Shalom of your city... how much more when we speak the language, have access to power, and can be agents of transformation!

Now I want you to note that, this idea of flourishing is bigger than just you. Imagine that. The call for people in exile is to seek the good of their city and the promise is that when the city prospers... you benefit too. If a city is divided, cantankerous, or lacks Shalom... then you will too.

So far in our series, we have seen **DIAGRAM 1** – That there are four things that Bible teaches will cause flourishing. Community – Divine Encounters – Character – Meaning and purpose. How are you doing on

each of these? If you want another opportunity at encountering God, I'd encourage you to join us for a worship night in the student center. "HUNGER" for the presence of God. Wednesday at 7 – less structured, just prayer and worship. No sermon, just people who are hungry for God. We compared them to studies at Harvard, Berkely, and dozens of scientific journals. Badabing... the new brain research and sociology teaches that the Bible was right all along. If you have been a Christian a long time, you might think that this is just repeat information. DUH, the Bible is right. But for our newer and younger people, this affirmation may be significant!

Today, we are going to a new place. We are looking at the idea of the kingdom of God through the lens of Shalom. First, let me give credit where credit is due.

Flourishing – **Agents of Flourishing** book cover – Amy Sherman has done some excellent Biblical thinking about this idea – and how it impacts society. This diagram is adapted from her work.

### **Diagram 2 – Hexagons**

Note at the center of it all is this "Kingdom of Shalom". It is the counterculture that we belong to. Our king is Jesus – the prince of Shalom. He has been very clear – as the culture goes toward selfishness, injustice, ugliness, violence, and relativism, we are to stand for the good, the true, the beautiful, the just, the prosperous and the sustainable.

I want you to imagine here in Omaha 3000 people who are all flourishing. All divinely connected to God, all in community, healthy, of high character and filled with the meaning of the kingdom of God. Now, inject those 3000 into culture and see what kind of a difference that makes. OR... multiply it beyond Christ Community to the 40,000 people in the Within Reach network of Christ followers. OR, maybe the 160,000 who are in church on a given Sunday. Unleash these people to bring flourishing on a city and what might happen? What if they took JESUS seriously not just for an hour on Sunday, but for 168 hours a week to "Seek First the Kingdom of God and his righteousness"? How might that transformation look?

In the next two weeks I am going to tackle all six boxes, their Biblical moorings as bringing the kingdom of Shalom and their practical implications. Now, I want to challenge YOU to see your every day existence – vocational, volunteer, and family – as an expression of these kingdom ideals. Look for yourself currently and who you aspire to be. It might be weighted to one box or many, but think about how YOU are seeking the good of the city as we go through these. Ready?

### **The Good**

**You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again, it is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled by people. Matthew 5:**

Jesus asks us to be salt. Salt not only makes meat tastier, but it preserves it from decay. In a world pre-refrigeration, that is critical. Jesus says – your job in the city is to bring SO MUCH GOOD that it preserves the city from Decay.

**Tim Keller – Christianity has been massive "Salt" in our culture – bringing education, healthcare, caring for the poor, acting unselfishly, promoting honesty, humility. America has dramatically benefitted from it (consciously or subconsciously). This creates ripple effects of Good.**

Youtuber with a vision about the rapture. Remove the good – remove the presence of the Spirit – remove prayer covering and it is tragic! Chaos erupts, crime increases, selfishness abounds, corruption is rampant.

Now, there is no organization that represents the good like the church. Seriously, when the church is working right there is nothing like it. It is where lonely people find community. It is where the lost find a connection with God, it is where the broken find reconciliation, where the hurting find healing, where the messed up get sanctified, where the hopeless find hope, where the demonized find freedom, where the addict finds goodness... God has chosen the local church as his means to be the bringer of goodness into this world.

The Church is the launch pad for religious organizations, philanthropic foundations, hospitals, schools, homeless, shelters, counseling centers, prolife organizations, food distribution movements, refugee and justice ministries. Not to mention movements like cityserve.

These kinds of ministries in turn become agents of the good.

- RISE- Started by Jeremy Bowman – a CCC guy – who saw a vision for helping prisoners to successfully reintegrate into culture as contributors, not as con men.
- Restored Wings – that had it's birth right across the parking lot in the porch and has grown to be a ministry transforming the lives of women caught in human trafficking. Bringing resources, love and freedom to the oppressed and abused.
- Assure – bringing life to unborn babies and resources to young mothers. These are just a few of the organizations here in Omaha standing for the good. And when you volunteer, support, give to, or work at these places... lives change and our city prospers.

The Bible champions the idea of imago dei – everyone matters because they were created in the image of God, not based on intellect, race, contribution to society. Traditional society is BASED on inequality – landowners and serfs, men and women, conquerors and conquered. But the church is counter cultural in that it believes that value is GIVEN to us because we represent God to this world. We are his image, his icon to a fallen planet. We believe that everybody has dignity as a result.

*The blessing of God and cultural mandate was given to both men and women*

This has profound ramifications for the culture we live in. For example, In ancient Rome, they opposed four activities that demeaned human dignity – abortion, infanticide, homosexuality and pederasty, and the gladiatorial games. It literally took hundreds of years, but the influence of the Christians in that culture profoundly changed the way that each was viewed.

When the church IS the good, IS flourishing and stands for right things, the culture around us prospers!

**The true** –

**Jeremiah 10:12 But God made the earth by his power; he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding.**

Notice the power, wisdom and understanding that established the earth and created an expanding universe – stretching out the heavens. God is a being who established the truths of the created order – physics, biology, chemistry, the periodic table of the elements... you name it.

And Jesus taught that in truth, there is freedom. "You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free." John 8:32

30X, Jesus said to his followers "I tell you the truth" or "Truly I say." And that is just in Matthew's book!

I pray that GOD will raise up a generation of men and women in the world of education who tell the truth about math and history and philosophy and gender and literature. I pray for those who are currently principals and teacher and professors that God will fill their mouths with the truth and their wills with the ability to transcend the pressures of the current culture and stand for what is really real.

Education in the truth is something that is just inherently good for culture. Prov 18:15 – The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge, for the ears of the wise seek it out.

### 1-Education cultivates the mind

One of the most beautiful gifts that God has given is our mind. And the opportunity to fill it with truth is wonderful! For the Christian, the goal of education is to know God and embrace his mission of Shalom in this world. But it is important to know that Education is for the 'common good', not just for Christians. The perpetuation of knowledge, of medicine, of technology, of cleanliness, of best practices in hygiene and environment and music is just good for everyone. But Christians who engage in education begin with a different starting point and agenda... it flows from God as the source of truth and toward Shalom as God's goal FOR truth.

2 Corinthians 10:5 – We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

We must take our thoughts captive and perpetuate the truth. Why? 2 - Education gives your people the knowledge and skills that can be thrown into the battle for peace, wholeness, Justice and delight.

Educated people have tools that others do not. Tools for engineering, for business, and for law. But none of this is new to modern day education. God has been about this for millennia. Consider how much the OT teaches about public health, earth keeping, conflict resolution and economics. It teaches a great deal about Politics, epistmolygy, family, speech, work, law, government – you name it! Because all of these fields are created by God and are good!

3 - Education allows us to master our world and fulfill the cultural mandate –our command in Genesis (Gen 1:28) to fill the earth and subdue it. Master it. Care for it. Steward it. Just think about what we can do because of educational exploration.

- This is why Christians have used knowledge to be inventors. And why Christians have a disproportionate number of Nobel Prizes. And why modern education developed in the Western Context where Christianity is truth-affirming. Inventors like Copernicus Kepler, Galileo, and Pascal were all practicing and passionate Christians...
- Monks in the middle ages innovated Chimneys, clocks, eye-glasses, the water wheel, fish farming
- Today, we are found Plumbing the depths of the ocean
- Understanding the human brain
- Mapping the human genome to solve genetic issues
- Grasping ecosystems and minimizing environmental impact

- This is why, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, thousands of elementary schools were founded by Christians – often using the towns church to double as a school house.
- That’s why Christians started the higher education movement – Harvard, Princeton, Brown, Rutgers, Emory, Duce Boston U, Northwestern, wake Forest... and you could go on a long time... Founded by Christians who believe that education is a key to the glory of God.

So educators, you are in good company! Every day you show up to work, you are the IMAGE of God when you promote the true. You bring his reign when you teach the truth. You are an agent of flourishing. And remember...

Truth is not a gathering of propositional statements. Truth is a person. Jesus did not simply say “I will teach you the truth or point you to the truth”, he said “I am the truth.” The ultimate goal of all truth is to point to the origin of truth, the speaker of truth, the creator of truth, the embodiment of truth. He loves when we embrace the truth because when we embrace the truth, we are one step closer to him.

## The Beautiful

Did you realize that the first person said to be filled with the Spirit was an artist?

Bezalel in Exodus 31 – at the creation of the tabernacle. [Exodus 31:1-5](#)

Artists are those who enhance the beautiful in our midst. The garden of Eden was filled with beauty, order and abundance. When people rebelled, beauty turned to ugly, order to chaos and abundance to scarcity. Artists are the ones who restore the beauty we were intended for. In fact, our landscape team, when they were started embraced these three words from a sermon I did years ago as their values – Beauty, Order and Abundance. And they have made our campus one of the most beautiful in Omaha, amen? And I am sure they would love to share their passion with any volunteers!

But that is a picture of what artists do.

We are a people who come from the beauty of creation and look forward to the beauty of the new creation. In our forms, our lives, our purposes, we must burst forth the new creation in our art and architecture.

Those who live in the world of the beautiful are Imitating a creation-oriented, beauty, saturated God. He makes beautiful things. He flung the stars into their place and arranged their glory. He put thousands of species of fish in the ocean – gloriously colorful and diverse – many of whom we have never even seen. He just did it because HE is creative and HE loves beauty. He arrays the fields with flowers and creates thousands of bird calls. He is the god of art and creativity and he invites us to be the little artists. His IMAGE in this world adding bits of beauty that reflect the grandeur of the creator.

- WE have a DESIRE for beauty written into our soul
  - When I was 19, I took my first mission trip to the Philippines. I was there 9 weeks, but one week we went to the garbage dump community in Metro Manilla. I was struck when I got there by the way that even in a garbage dump, people created beauty spots. It might be plastic flowers that they found in the trash and carefully arranged on thei

porch. Or wrapping paper that covered their dull grey and brown walls. Even at a subsistence level, they invested in things that are beautiful.

- God made us with this desire... and satisfying that desire is a good thing.
- Now, it should be pointed out that great beauty is created by Christian artists, musicians, architects and city planners. One of the markers that we are all created in God's image is that we have the desire and capacity for beauty. We are broken by sin, but still retain the divine IMAGE that desires beauty in the midst of the ugly. Even though some people do not know God... they still reflect God! Let's throw out a few ways Christians have contributed to the arena of Beauty in this world

- The ceiling of the **Sistine Chapel** – Michelangelo
- **The Last Supper** – Davinci
- **The Return of the Prodigal Son** – Rembrandt
- Cathedrals like the **duomo di Milano**, which took 600 years to build, are models of Gothic architecture designed to throw your gaze upward and look to the heavens
- But it is not just art with Christian themes... it is anything that inspires awe. It is **the floral designers** craft or the **landscape architect's park**. It is the **building** designed with excellence for politics or Medical care or business or as a home... all of these pieces of beauty add value to humanity and bring glory to God.
- **Central Park** in NYC is known as the "Largest piece of religious art in the city." Fredrick Law Olmstead, who designed the park, said that it was "a specimen of God's handiwork." And he hoped that it would heal the hundreds of thousands of tired workers of vital exhaustion, nervous irritation and constitutional depressions. His mission was to bring spiritual relief to tired workers.

Here in our city, whether it is the **Desert Dome** of the Henry Doorly Zoo, the city planning of the **Gene Leahy Mall**, the creativity of the **Fat Putter Mini Golf** experience, or the **massive mural outside** of Charles Schwab field... each contributes to beauty and therefore the glory of God.

Music –

- In any given year, nearly two thirds of American adults hear live music in a worship service. That is far more than experience live pop, jazz, opera or classical. Richard Hayes of Duke Divinity school urges church leaders to take seriously the artistic crafting of services. The effects of lighting, architecture, music choices, instrumentation, vocalists and flow MATTER in bringing beauty into the church and the world. There is inherent value in this
- Development of musicians happens profoundly in the church. American Idol – ever notice how many people say "I fell in love with music singing in the church." "I had my first solo in church." "My pianist at church taught me..."

Closer

- Jesus is beautiful! He is pleased in our beauty! Whether it is music, art or architecture... God loves when we imitate him by infusing beauty into this world.
- Truth and goodness will reach some people, but beauty is necessary to reach one more.

- Diagram 2 – so, do you see yourself yet? Do you see the ways that you reflect the image of God? Are you good to go?
- Or maybe you are in the category of the just, the prosperous or the sustainable.... Tune in next week for those. AND if you have a friend in those categories.... Bring them along! We need all of the agents of flourishing we can get.

Prayer.