

In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. At first, there was nothing, and then at the word of God, light came into being. Sun, moon and stars, land, water. Then God filled the earth with plants and creatures, and finally man. And this creation was perfect. There was no blemish. There was no brokenness. It was idyllic.

Relationships were right. God came and walked with mankind, talking and relating without barrier. Adam and Eve related perfectly—every vulnerability exposed, they walked and worked together in harmony. The earth was lush and ripe and provided everything that mankind needed to survive. Adam and Eve worked, but their work was fulfilling and life-giving.

And then one day, it all fell apart. There was a tree, you see. A tree in the middle of the garden - the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The one negative command that God had given was challenged and then disobeyed. And everything changed.

When God came to walk in the garden that day, Adam and Eve were hiding. No longer could they walk without fear or shame - no... instead they hid. The relationship between Adam and Eve was now doomed to be one of conflict and fighting for dominance. The land was no longer so giving and forgiving, but would require toil and backbreaking labor to produce what they needed to survive. Mankind's relationships were a mess. Relationship with God, relationship with one another, relationship with the land, even relationship with self - now all were full of self-delusion, shame, and fear.

But the rebellion of mankind did not hold God back. No, he immediately made plans for a daring rescue of the world. It would be years in coming, it would take many generations, but he would see the world transformed and restored. He would see mankind reconciled to himself and one another.

So God called a man named Abram to leave his father and mother and go to a land he would be shown. God promised Abram that his offspring would be more numerous than the stars in the sky, that he would be given land, and that all nations of the world would be blessed through him. So Abram went, and God put into motion his plan of rescue.

Eventually, Abram's offspring became a great nation - a nation called and set apart by God to bless the world and to walk in the world as representatives of the living God, Yahweh. Every action, every law, every human relationship was to be lived according to the commands of Yahweh so that people would see and remember who God is and how much he loves the world.

And then came the day that Jesus was born, as the perfect picture of who God is and how much he loves the world. Jesus lived and loved and ministered and died. And then God built the church, and called us to participate in this great plan of rescue

and redemption and reconciliation.

And this is the calling that we are invited to:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Our firm decision is to work from this focused center: Jesus died for everyone. That puts everyone in the same boat. He included everyone in his death so that everyone could also be included in his life, a resurrection life, a far better life than people ever lived on their own.

Because of this decision we don't evaluate people by what they have or how they look. We looked at the Messiah that way once and got it all wrong, as you know. We certainly don't look at him that way anymore. Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life begins! Look at it!

Instead of selfishness, we now can be selfless. Instead of greed, we now can give generously what we have. Instead of being filled with lust, we now can love people who are ugly. Instead of being prideful, we know that everything that we have and are comes from God. Instead of seeking the approval of others, we now know that we have God's approval.

All this comes from the God who healed our broken relationship with him, with ourselves, and with each other. He now asks us to spend our lives working to help other people heal their broken relationships. If we choose to walk with God, then our job is to also walk with others and bear their burdens and help men and women drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right.

But how is this possible? It's possible because God made Jesus, who had no brokenness, to be broken for our sakes, so that through his body and blood, we could become the children of God.

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