**In the Beginning Week 3**

**Series Big Idea:** God’s dream in the beginning was a community of love, beauty, and oneness.

**Message Big Idea**: God’s dream is for both men and women to fully express their God-given potential as people created in his image.

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:26-31, 3:16, 2:18, Galatians 3:26-27

**Introduction: Accomplishments**

To start of this morning, I want to share with you a list of accomplishments of 5 amazing historical individuals, and I’d love to see if you can guess what these 5 people have in common. Ready? Here we go. *(1 Slide with 5 silhouettes and a symbol for each revealed as we talk about them.)*

Individual #1: *(Symbol-Red Cross)* After treating injured Union soldiers on the battlefield during the Civil War, this person went on to found and serve as the first president of the American Red Cross. *(Clara Barton)*

Individual #2: *(Symbol-Computer)* A computing trailblazer, this person invented one of the first easy-to-use computer languages which revolutionized the field of computer programming. *(Grace Hopper)*

Individual #3: *(Symbol-Microphone)* This singer won 12 Grammys, was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and is considered one of the greatest jazz singers of all time. *(Ella Fitzgerald)*

Individual #4: *(Symbol-Radium)* This physicist won the Nobel Prize not once, but twice for research that led to the discovery of radioactivity as well as the element radium. *(Marie Curie)*

Individual #5: *(Symbol-Monument)* This person is the most acclaimed site-specific architect in contemporary America known for works such as the Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C. *(Maya Lin)*

All right, that’s our list of 5 accomplished individuals. Did you figure out what they all have in common? That’s right! *(Add names/pictures to slide)* They are all women! Some you may have heard of, others you may not know, but they represent some of the major contributions women have made in various sectors of society.

**Series Recap**

Today we are continuing our series “In the Beginning.” During this series, we’ve been going back to the very beginning to discover God’s original dream for the world. God’s dream in the beginning was a community of love, beauty, and oneness. But sadly, we are far from what God intended.

As Christ-followers, we are called to partner with God in restoring his dream for this world. That’s what this series is about. So how can we join God in his work of restoration?

Today we want to talk about God’s dream for men and women. Who did he create us to be? How does he want us to relate to one another? ‘Cause let’s face it, when it comes to men and women, things don’t always go smoothly. Just ask our friends, Ray and Debra Barone…

**Video: Everybody Loves Raymond Suitcase Clip**

(3-minute version of [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oyKzTMv1BI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oyKzTMv1BI" \t "_blank))

**God’s Dream for Men and Women**

So what is God’s dream for men and women? Let’s go back to the beginning… In Genesis 1 we read:

***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.”***

***So God created human beings in his own image.***

 ***In the image of God he created them;***

 ***male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26-27 NLT)***

In the beginning, both men and women are created in the likeness of God. We are both made in his image. Both men and women carry God’s nature and characteristics; we both reflect something of what God is like. The theological term for this is the **Imago Dei**.

Something interesting about this poem in Genesis… in the original language of the Bible, “human beings” is spoken of as singular…meaning he created *him*, he created *her*. But it is also spoken of as plural…he created *them*. What this means is that I, as an individual, reflect something of the image of God; but on the other hand, we, as a community of men and women, fully reflect the image of God. Only in a community of human beings can we fully reflect the Imago Dei.

Now, when we talk about God’s original dream for men and women here in Genesis, let me make sure you understand that we’re not talking about marriage. The marriage relationship is a great example of how the Imago Dei can be reflected, but God’s dream for this partnership is bigger than that. He designed us to be partners in ruling the earth. Continuing in Genesis 1:

***Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.”***

***…And that is what happened. (Genesis 1:28, 30 NLT)***

Here in the beginning, men and women are given the same commission to govern or reign or rule. No matter what walk of life we come from, no matter our gender, we are designed for this. We are created as equal partners and commissioned to carry out God’s purposes in the world.

But, sometimes there is confusion about this. When we turn the page to Genesis 2 and read another account of creation, some think there is a hierarchy reflected there. The confusion often comes from verse 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.” (Genesis 2:18 NLT)***

What’s the word that causes confusion? Yep, it’s that word *(underline)* “helper.” When God makes Eve, she is a called a “helper” who is just right for Adam. But just what does this word “helper” actually mean?

The word is the Hebrew word “**EZER**” *(pronounced āzer with a long sounding ā, as in razor)*. EZER is a powerful military word that is used in it’s various forms over 100 times in the Old Testament. The vast majority of times the word appears, guess to whom it refers? It most often refers to God. EZER describes God’s strength and God’s power as our helper. EZER is about what help looks like not about hierarchy. The EZER is a warrior! When God looked at the man he created, he said, *“It is not good for the man to be alone, he needs a warrior!”* And so he created you, ladies. To every woman in this room, you are a warrior! Turn to a woman near you and tell her, “You are a warrior!” That is your calling regardless of your age, your marital status, or your circumstances. Women are to be warriors for God alongside our brothers-in-Christ as partners in carrying out God’s purposes in this world.

This was the world God created. This was God’s dream. A world of partnership. A world of equality. A world of oneness. And when he stepped back and surveyed it, what did he say? *(On Screen: “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” Genesis 1:31)* He said it was “*very* good.”

**The Fall and The Curse**

But this goodness didn’t last long. *(As you begin this part of the message, take out a sling and put it on so that you lose use of one of your arms. Don’t comment on it, just let it raise curiosity.)*

When Adam and Eve sin, they shatter God’s dream for people. Not only did sin separate us from God, it had consequences for our relationships with one another. When God says to Eve…

***“Your desire will be for your husband,***

 ***and he will rule over you.” (Genesis 3:16)***

…he’s describing not what should be, but what has now happened. Having one gender “rule” over the other is not God’s dream for humanity; it is the result of the curse of sin. The systems of hierarchy began on this day. And I believe it broke God’s heart.

Sadly, we still experience the effects of the curse to this day. For example…

* Women currently hold less than 5% of CEO positions at S&P 500 companies.[[1]](#endnote-1)
* While the wage gap between men and women seems to be shrinking, most researchers agree that on average women are still paid at least 5% less than men.
* Worldwide, approximately 63 million girls are denied the right to education.[[2]](#endnote-2)
* The United Nations estimates that as many as 200 million girls are “missing” in the world today – killed, aborted, or abandoned simply because they are girls.[[3]](#endnote-3)

The effects of The Fall and The Curse continue. We see it everywhere…

**Video: Like a Girl** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjJQBjWYDTs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjJQBjWYDTs" \t "_blank)

How did “like a girl” become synonymous with “less than” or “weaker than” when “like a girl” is supposed to mean “like a warrior?”

Sadly, the effects of The Fall and The Curse have not only been things that have happened out there, they’ve also been things that have happened in here. Throughout history, the church has fallen into these patterns of hierarchy and limited opportunities for women to fully express the Imago Dei. Too often the church has sidelined its warriors telling them they can’t lead or teach. Too often the church has lived by The Curse, not The Dream, and in doing so, it’s like we’ve tried to carry out the work of God in the world without the use of one of our perfectly capable arms.

*(Personal story…For men, this could be a good time to tell a story of how you have seen your daughter or a woman you care about experience The Curse).* As a woman in vocational ministry, there are times when I’ve experienced the curse.

* I’ve sat at tables with male pastors who made it clear they didn’t think I should be there.
* When I was fundraising to plant the Lincoln Square Campus, I reached out to the church I grew up in and was told, “First of all, don’t refer to yourself as a pastor.” Needless to say, they didn’t financially support me.
* It took me a long time to live into my calling as a pastor and teacher because there were so few role models showing me the way.

How can the curse be reversed? How can we restore God’s dream for the world?

Thankfully, someone came to show us how.

**Jesus Comes to Restore God’s Dream**

One of my favorite interactions between Jesus and a person was an incident between him and a woman who had suffered from chronic bleeding for more than a decade. She had sought almost every option imaginable in order to find a cure for her illness, but the bleeding continued. It made her an outcast – religious rules at that time would prohibit anyone from having contact with her since she was considered “unclean.” She is so desperate that when she hears this Rabbi is performing miracles, she thinks to herself, “I have nothing to lose.”

Jesus is on his way to heal the sick daughter of a man who was in charge of the local synagogue.

* He is the important one.
* He is the one with status.

No doubt, the crowd would have urged Jesus to go quickly and heal this man’s daughter.

*(On Screen: Luke 8:44)* But as Jesus moves through the crowd, this woman takes a huge risk and maneuvers her way up behind him, and she touches his robe.

*(On Screen: “Who touched me?” Jesus asked. Luke 8:45)* Jesus turns and asks, ***“Who touched me?”*** which is interesting. This is Jesus. I’m pretty sure he knew who touched him. But it would be just like him to want to acknowledge this woman publically, to bring her out from behind the shadow of her pain and shame. *(On Screen: Luke 8:48)* So he turns to her and says, ***“Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace.”*** Go in *peace*. Go in ***shalom***. Go in the wholeness God intended for you from the beginning.

Jesus took time to heal this woman. He offered her dignity and love. But this was consistent with how Jesus repeatedly elevated women. In a culture steeped in the curse where women were often viewed as nothing more than property, Jesus treats women according to the dream – according to what God originally intended.

* Jesus first revealed himself as the Messiah to a **woman** (John 4:25-26)
* **Women** were included in his expanded group of disciples (Mark 15:41).
* **Women** like Mary of Bethany were permitted to sit at his feet, beside the men, learning as he taught, something unheard of in that culture (Luke 10:39).
* Following his resurrection, he first appeared to a **woman** in spite of the fact that at that time a woman’s testimony held no weight in the court of law (John 20:1-16).

To Jesus “like a girl” would mean like a person who is worthy of dignity, honor, and respect; one who is equally created in the image of God. Jesus came to restore God’s dream for the world and that included restoring God’s dream for women.

See, I believe Jesus demonstrated that the mission of helping people find their way back to God and restoring God’s dream for our world will only be accomplished when we stop limiting ourselves to one arm *(Take arm out from the sling)* and free women to be who God created them to be*.*

Jesus came to restore God’s dream for the world. The early Christian leaders recognized that. That is why Paul declares:

***“For you are all childrenof God through faith in Christ Jesus…There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:26, 28)***

Scot McKnight, one of the leading New Testament theologians of our day says this about Paul’s words: *“In the same way that there was to be no cultural or racial distinctions and no social status prejudices, there was to be no sexual prejudice…”*

Jesus came to restore God’s dream for the world including God’s dream for men and women. But sadly, the restoration of God’s dream is both a now and a not yet…

**Challenge: Help Restore God’s Dream**

That’s why we **all** have a role to play in restoring God’s dream for men **and** women. This is the responsibility of **anyone** who believes all people ware created equally in the image of God. If you are a Christ-follower, the fact that women do not have the same opportunities as men and are often not treated equally to men is an injustice we are called to reverse.

So I want to call all of us today to help restore God’s dream for men and women. Here are a couple challenges:

**Challenge #1**: **Don’t Perpetuate the Curse.** Listen and look for the subtle and not-so-subtle ways we contribute to prolonging the curse. Using a phrase such as “like a girl” is just one example. Overlooking women when considering leadership opportunities is another. Let’s call out remnants of the curse when we see them in the church or in our culture or in ourselves and refuse to accept the curse as “just the way it is.” Let’s live according to God’s dream – let’s live as God originally intended.

**Challenge #2: Partner to Restore God’s Dream.**

To the **Women** in the room: Sometimes we are the ones living by the curse. That voice inside your head that whispers to you that you can’t, telling you that you don’t belong…that voice is not from God. You may not have had enough role models showing you the way, but my charge to you today is to step into all God created you to be. Stop carrying the limitations of the curse. You are made in the image of God. You are gifted to carry out his purposes in this world. You are a warrior! Step into all God created you to be!

To the **Men** in the room: It matters to us that you stand with us and stand for us like Jesus stood with the women in his day. Often in our culture and in the church, you hold many of the positions of power and influence. Will you use your position to help restore God’s dream? Listen to the women around you, speak up, advocate for your sisters.

**Conclusion**

When COMMUNITY was a young church, the leadership had to make some decisions regarding how we’d interpret Scripture when it comes to women in leadership. I’ve heard from Dave and Jon that they knew there would be people who disagreed with their findings no matter which direction they took. But they also knew they had to stay true to what they believed God intended and true to how God wanted COMMUNITY to fulfill his mission.

After much prayer, research, and seeking wise counsel, they reached the conclusion that God’s dream was for both men and women to express their God-given gifts to their greatest extent, that opportunities to lead and serve would not be based on gender, but on giftedness and maturity.

I am thankful that COMMUNITY is a place where I am able to use the gifts God has given me to contribute to the mission. I’m also thankful for my “sister warriors” who God is using in a powerful way to lead here at the Yellow Box. *(Acknowledge some women at your campus…)* Warriors like…

* Sharie Behnke and Sue Ferguson who lead in our Small Group ministry.
* Kathy Ives who leads Kids’ City.
* Mary Leddon, Pam Haines, and others who have served on our Leadership Commission.
* Kirsten Strand and Amy Plummer who lead Community 4:12.
* The many women leading Small Groups and Ministry Teams.
* I could go on and on and on.

I am thankful for these leaders and the contributions they are making to the mission. I am grateful for the strides we’ve made in restoring God’s dream for men and women, but we also have a long way to go. Let’s not stop until every little girl that grows up in our church has the opportunity to fully develop and exercise the gifts God has given her and laughs at the notion that there was once a time when her gender might have limited her opportunities to contribute to the mission of Jesus.

God has a dream for the world, and we are called to join him in restoring it.

As I close, I’d like for us to stand together and join hands as a community of people collectively reflecting the image of God and commit to partnering together to carry out the work of restoring God’s dream for the world. Would you stand and pray with me?

1. Catalyst.org, “Women CEOs of the S&P 500,” February 3, 2016, <http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/women-ceos-sp-500>, Accessed May 13, 2016. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Unesdoc. UNESCO.org, “A growing number of children and adolescents

are out of school as aid fails to meet the mark,” July 2015, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002336/233610e.pdf>, Accessed May 13, 2016. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISme5-9orR0 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)