

OK, at the beginning of the evening I posed you this question to you:

Out of these three areas of your life:

image, achievement or relationship

which would you most like to see most success in?

If I could grant you success in only one of these areas which would you choose?

Well, in my marriage preparation classes,

99 times out of a 100 the couple will say... Relationships.

*"If I could choose any area of my life to be a success in I'd choose relationships".*

Now that could be because they are sitting next to the love of their life

*and any other answer would mean that I'd need to bring forward the*

*"how to handle hurt and conflict" session.*

But they almost always choose Relationships.

I think it's instinctive to know that

the key to happiness and fulfillment in our life

is not found in what we look like,

or in what we achieve,

but in relationships.

**We are relational creatures.**

And one of the key differences between Christianity and all other faiths

is the reasoning as to WHY we are relational creatures.

Why are relationships SO important to us?

That's what I want to talk about tonight

I want to say 3 things

- the reason why we need relationships
- the kind of relationships we need; and
- the key to getting them.

Why we need relationships, the kind of relationships we need; and the key to getting them.

And all of these ideas spring from the opening verses of the Bible and it would help me if you would turn to page 4 – Genesis chapter 1.

So let's begin with

### **1. Why we need relationships.**

One of the interesting things about the Biblical creation account is that every time you see God creating something –

when he creates the sun and moon, the earth and sea; the vegetation and animals

every time he creates something, the Bible says "he created it, HE created it".

But when it comes to humanity –

*(and only when it comes to humanity)*

**the pronoun changes and becomes plural.**

When God creates humanity, God suddenly is referred to as plural.

*v26 Then God said “let us make man in our image, our likeness”*

Not “my image” but “our image”,  
not “he” but “us”

right from the very beginning of the Bible,

God is revealed to us and only us as “personal and plural”.

God is not **IMpersonal** – he is not like the life-force in Star Wars, or Ying and Yang, or Chi or anything like that

Nor is he **multiple** as in Greek, Roman, Babylonian / Indian, Aztec, Norse or so many other religions.

God is revealed to us as someone who is “personal, relational, community”.

The Beginning-less God is a unity of persons delighting in each other,  
loving each other, communicating with each other, for all of eternity.

every other faith, every other religion

has multiple gods bickering and warring with each other, OR

unknowable, unapproachable, distant gods

But only Christianity reveals God as one person in loving community with himself.

**Now why is this such a big deal?**

Well, because God says

*“let us make man in our image, in our likeness”*

In other words,

IF God is both “personal and community”,

AND we are made in his likeness, in his image, in his reflection.

Then (it stands to reason)

that we ourselves, will find ourselves, will find our identity, in personal community relationships.

This is the only way of explaining Chapter 2v18. Where God says:

*“It is not good for man to be alone”.*

Why is it NOT good for man to be alone?

Up to now everything that God has created is good

the light is good.

the plants are good

the animals are good!

Everything is good!

But suddenly God makes something that is NOT good, not fulfilled, not complete

Man is lonely.

Why?

Because human beings are made in the image of someone who is not just a “me” but also an “us”

God is not just a “me” he’s an “us” also.

And therefore

WE won’t be happy if we are just “me-s” because we also need to be “us-es”.

God made us for community. To be an “us” not a just “me”.  
He made us in the image of himself.

And therefore, we will never find our true selves, our true fulfilment, our true happiness  
if we see ourselves as only a “me” and not also as “an us”

if we try to be “just be a me” alone.  
We will struggle with issues of self-image,  
We will struggle with fulfilment,  
we will struggle for acceptance

This is why, instinctively, the overwhelming majority of us would have said  
*Steve, if you can only give me success in one area of my life “then let it be relationships”.*

That’s why is both instinctively clear, and biblically obvious that  
achievement, image, possessions won’t make us happy or fulfilled.  
despite the fact that all our **education establishments teach us** and **work encourages** us to see  
“achievement” as what its all about  
despite the fact that **magazines** (especially teenage magazines) say “image” (the way we look, the clothes  
we wear) is what we should strive after; and  
despite the fact that **advertisements** bombard us with “things” as being the key to fulfilment

We know (Instinctively and Biblically) that what we need,  
what we have been made for, are deep personal community relationships  
because we have been made in the image of someone who is himself fundamentally relational.  
That’s why we need relationships.

## **2. But what kind of relationships do we need?**

Well we need 2 types, The first is, unsurprisingly,

### **2.1 we need a deep personal relationship with God.**

But what do you imagine a relationship with God should be like?

Well how do you imagine God created our world?  
In my cruder moments  
I think perhaps that God is like some powerful Magician  
who enters a dark room,  
rolls up his sleeves,  
waves his arms and points  
and pow “we get light”, and kaboom “we get stars”, and hey-presto “we get animals”

But actually, in Genesis, we are told that God speaks  
*“and God **said** let there be light”...*

Now why does God speak?

why doesn’t he just think?, why doesn’t he just imagine?, why doesn’t just point!?  
Why does the Bible say God “speaks creation into being”?

Well because, whenever we speak, we are communicating,

When we speak we involve ourselves in a relationship with the thing we are speaking to

When we speak we are connecting with that which is hearing us.

God speaks because he is connecting with what he makes.

And In John Chapter 1, it goes further,

we are told that the Word that God speaks, the way that God connects, is not a language - it's a person.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

*He was with God in the beginning.*

*Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*

*And in him was life, and that life was the light of men.*

God speaks and that Word is our life!

And in Proverbs 8, we get even more. It says

*v27 I was there when he set the heavens in place,*

*when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep,*

*when he established the clouds above...*

*Then I was the craftsman at his side.*

*And I was filled with delight day after day,*

*rejoicing always in his presence,*

*rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind.*

The Hebrew word here for "delight" means to dance, to skip, to be so excited that he waltzed his way through creation.

This is no Old Man with a Beard and a pointy wand making stuff appearing out of nothing.

This is a community event, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Working together, dancing together, weaving together creation and its fun! and it's a delight! and it's good!

There is laughing, and a sense of community and dance in this creation

Loving and being loved,

Knowing and being known,

Praising and being praised

Enjoying and being enjoyed.

God is having a good time!

And so when it says, "let us make humanity in our image"

God is saying –

I don't want to make a robot,

I don't want to make a bio-mechanical machine (no matter how complex it may be),

I am going to make something

that will speak with me, that will reflect my love,

That can know and be known,

praise can be praised,

enjoy and be enjoyed

I want to make something capable of joining in the dance.

This is what you are created for!

Now is that anything like what the average person thinks religion is like?

Is this anything like what the average person thinks Christianity is like?

This is what a relationship with God is like!

You are called into a dance.

You are called to overflow with the joy of who he is

You are called to be a dance partner in this personal community relationship with God.

It's not about "I'm trying to be good", "I need to keep the rules", "I hope he likes me",

That's not what what's its about!

You and I were for a deep relationship with God

To give, to enjoy, to delight and to know

That's what you are made for and

that's the very **first** type of relationship we need to fulfil our humanity.

The second is

## **2.2 We also need a deep unity with other human beings.**

What is surprising about God saying

*"it is not good for Adam to be alone"*

is the fact that he is sitting in paradise!

Adam is in paradise!

The food is better than MacDonalds, better than Raymond Blanc

The flower show is better than Chelsea

The job description is the ultimate – *You can rule the world!!!*

Adam has beauty, security, the wonder of nature to explore (he gets to name all the animals –

I think I'll call you Percy!)

he has no sin, he has a relationship with God, he has everything!

And still God says –

this is not good - he is lonely.

Look, this is staggering.

Look at the humility of what God does here...

He creates something, on purpose,

that a perfect world, a perfect job description and (even) a perfect relationship him – cannot satisfy.

The Greatest Home, The Greatest Job, The Greatest God – and its not enough

God is saying

In order for you to be you,

In order for you to be complete

In order *for me* to show/ teach/ for you to experience

*you* all the things I want to show you

You need other human beings.

Paradise isn't Paradise, without the love of someone just like us.

Paradise isn't Paradise without friendship.

And this means three things.

### **2.1 Firstly, that friendships are primary.**

There our increasingly individualistic society we sacrifice committed relationships because we are pursuing fun, or a career, or a beautiful home, or even paradise but Adam had all of them, and he was lonely.

So our priorities are firstly about loving God and loving others – and we make a huge mistake when we sacrifice them for exams, for jobs, for careers, for houses, for things for our own pleasure.

### **2.2 Secondly, we can never know what God is like, until you have discovered community.**

We can't grow into the likeness of a God who is an "us" if we wish to just remain being "me"

We can't get to know God fully by ourselves.

Love, joy, patience – we need community.

You need people to love to show love

You need people to be kind to, to understand real joy

You need people who annoy you to learn patience.

We can't grow to be like God without community.

We live in a culture that shuns commitment, that walks away from accountability for others, for whom "duty" is a four-letter word!

We are rubbish at commitment, at sticking with (loving) people who are not like us!

But we need other people to tell us what we are like.

*Have you ever heard yourself on tape? have you ever listened to your own voice and said "gosh, who IS that whiny person! - that can't be me?"*

*And your friends say "Oh yes it can!"*

*Have you ever seen yourself in a picture and said "Gosh do I really look like that!, I must have had been having a really bad hair day!?... and our friends go really quiet... why, because everyday for us is a really bad hair-day!"*

We come to church, or read a book or listen to a sermon,  
but 80% of what we're hearing, we don't know how it applies to us,  
because we don't know who we are, or how we come across.  
We need friends for that!

We need people we can trust who will tell us what we are really like.

A group of people who affirm us, who love us, who will bear our burdens with us,  
but with whom we can share our fears and troubles and weaknesses.

Who will be like God to us.

That's why we have small groups.

That's why Chris makes small groups an absolutely integral part of our Youth Ministry.

That's why half the church is in a house group.

Because we all need to be in some form of small group -

because relationships are primary,

because we will never know what God is like without each other.

### **2.3 and thirdly, because we need friends you are NOT like us.**

God brought Eve to Adam.

Physically, Psychologically, Temperamentally, Emotionally she was different to him!

God brought someone who like him, but not like him so that Adam could discover who he is.

We need people who are not like us to reveal us to us.

Who will things differently to us, have different insights to us, approach things differently to us.

God brings Eve to Adam, someone he is going spend the rest of his life trying to understand – and she him!

She is his helper – but that doesn't mean she is “someone to wash the dishes and run errands” –

it means someone to help discover who he is.

God calls himself “our helper – an ever-present help in times of trouble”.

To be a helper is not a derogatory term.

Adam and Eve are each other's friends, each other's loves, each other's helpers.

She is someone who will stretch him, teach him humility, reveal to him what he is like,

show him that he is not always right (believe me I know what I am taking about!)

Therefore

We need friends who are not like us.

We need this community

We need to invest ourselves in each other.

We need to find God as our deepest, closest, friend; and

we need to find each other as our community – that we commit to.

Do you see?

So if this sermon is to have any impact

if it is to be, to you, anything other than hot air

if the opening verses of scripture that reveal who we are,

are to make a difference

then for you the call is for you have to commit to this fellowship, this family

to make FNL/Afterhours/small groups your community and commit to them

to make home groups, service here, this congregation your community and commit to us

So how?

### **3. What is the key to getting these type of relationships?**

Well I think the key is found in verse 25.

*They were naked, and they were unashamed.*

*Now I'm not suggesting we all strip off and get naked together.*

*Except why not? Why would that such a stunningly embarrassing thing to do*

Adam and Eve were naked

it means they were transparent with each other

it means they were not in control of what the other person saw of them

it means they didn't need to hide,

they were not afraid of exposure,

they weren't afraid of being explored,  
they were completely comfortable with who they were in front of each other.

My friends, this is what we need.  
This is the key we're looking for.

We need to be known, and yet loved.  
We need to be seen and accepted  
We need to be spiritually, emotionally, psychologically naked and completely comfortable in front of each other.  
And the problem with us (and our world is) we cannot do it.

So we have a choice  
We can either cover up our worst bits (our selfishness, our insecurities, our shames) and try to get loved, or we can show ourselves as we truly are and risk rejection – which will hurt even more.

Deep down in our hearts we know there is something wrong with us.  
whether we believe the Bible or not  
whether we believe this story or not,  
we **know** there is something wrong with us.  
And so in all our relationships we are tempted to cover and deflect and spin and pretend and so our community remains achingly superficial.

What we desperately need more than anything else  
is for someone to know us and still to love us  
is for someone to see us and still approve...  
To have this soul deep satisfaction of being known and loved.

*When somebody you don't know says, I really like you. You feel good.  
But when someone who knows you deeply says "you are one of the finest people I have ever known" - now that means something!*

We find this love in God.  
He sees you, he knows you and he loves you unconditionally  
He finds you spiritually naked and he stoops down and provides cover for you.  
He covers our shame.

On the cross, when Jesus Christ was crucified, he was crucified naked.  
The only piece of clothing that he had was stripped from him and the soldiers played dice for it.  
When Jesus was crucified, he was crucified naked, because this was to be his final humiliation.

But listen, his nakedness covers our sins.  
Dying, beaten up by life, naked, abused, ashamed on the cross God takes it all from us  
He takes it from us: he'll take our lying, our selfishness, our betrayals – he'll take from us and he'll take it from us.  
to show you that you can throw it all at him and he will still take it and love you.  
His nakedness is the love that covers our shame.  
He knows who you are, he knows everything about you and still he loves you.

And if you take this love, this affirmation, this unconditional sense of belonging  
if you take it into the middle of your life and build your life around it.  
You will realise that you need never pretend with God again,  
You can be naked and unashamed before God  
You can be yourself and not need to run away; and  
And his love will change you.

***Will you do that you can do that tonight?***

Moreover, if we can be transparent before God and know WE are loved,  
then we don't need to pretend before others.

You know I am not perfect, I am screwed up, I am insecure  
But so are we all  
I have no right to judge you, ☺ you have no right to judge me.  
We can be community together.

***Will you be that tonight, for me, for the person sitting next to you, for you?***

What we need is deep friendships:

- deep friendship with God
- community with others.

You find that in Jesus tonight, you can find that at Southover.  
I urge you to do this, for this is what you were made for.