



# The True Story That Changes Everything

A Community Development  
Bible Study in Six Acts

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A **MISSION** Publication

# Introduction

Each year, 1MISSION hosts thousands of build trip participants at our basecamp in Mexico. While serving with us for an action-packed few days, participants play a key role at one stage in the build process. And we're really grateful for that!

But for us, it's important to understand that housing is just one piece of a much larger puzzle known as community development. For the families you are serving alongside, the community development process began months or even years before you arrive. And the life-changing impacts of that process will continue long after you've returned home. That's a good thing!

We wrote this study for you—trip participants and leaders—to give you a practical and accessible framework for understanding the story you're stepping into.

It is our hope that in working through this study, you'd gain a deeper appreciation for the biblical narrative—the true story that changes everything. And we hope that during your trip you'll have a more profound appreciation for the community development story you're stepping into as well.

– Nate Hughes and Tim Hoiland





## ACT 1

# Creation

*Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”*

*Genesis 1:26-28`*

It's one of the first things we learn in Sunday school: God created the world and he called it good.

God's creation includes the earth and the sky, oceans and rivers, birds and cattle and wild animals. It includes the sun and the moon and the stars. And it includes you and me.

In fact, unique among everything that God created, we learn that human beings are made in the image of God. Theologians throughout history have debated the nuances and implications of that truth, but here's something we can all agree on: human beings are special. We are special because God made us to reflect him. And part of the way we reflect his image is by taking care of creation, which he has entrusted to our care.

We worship God not only on Sunday mornings when we sing songs of praise or when we hear sermons from the Bible. We worship God each and every day by doing what he has created us to do. And what has God created us to do?

At a fundamental level, human beings glorify our Creator God by imitating him in his creative work. We may think of "creative work" as the realm of musicians and painters and graphic designers.

But really, creativity is in all of our DNA—yours and mine. We are created to create. And we are created to care for what has already been created. We are created to extend the benefits of God's good creation to our neighbors, and especially with those who don't currently enjoy the benefits we do. God's creation is good, and like a big order of chips and guac, it's best shared.

Now, I know what you're thinking: the world may have been created good, sure, but it seems pretty messed up a lot of the time. We'll get into that soon enough (see chapter 2). But for now, we want to focus on how the world was originally intended to be. Adam and Eve lived in perfect harmony with God, with each other, and with the created world God had entrusted to their care.

Here's something else that was present in that perfect world, which

Every person we meet has God-given dignity as image bearers. Everyone has something to offer.

may surprise you. In the Garden of Eden, before sin ruined everything, there was work. God told Adam and Eve, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” The tending of the garden and the ruling over the animals would have taken work and intentionality. While not the same as work as we know it, it was work nonetheless. And it was good!

As God’s image-bearers, our work is a reflection of his work. Image bearers participate in what God is doing in the world. None of us are meant to be bystanders. As Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians, “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

This is why mutually enriching relationships are at the center of everything 1MISSION does. We believe that every single person we meet has God-given dignity as image bearers. No one is a bystander. Everyone has something to offer.

When a family in Mexico, El Salvador, or Nicaragua applies for a new house through 1MISSION, they are committing to a process that is participatory. They know this isn’t a handout situation. They know that hard work awaits them. And that’s what they sign up for.

Insisting that everyone participates in the process of earning a new house is important on a couple of levels. On one level, it’s pragmatic. We know from experience and from best practices in the field of poverty alleviation that handouts can destroy dignity. Being invited to participate in a process and having the power to make important decisions along the way is how dignity is affirmed.

The other reason for insisting on a participatory approach is theological, rooted in Genesis 1: people who bear the image of God honor him when they participate in the process of creating something new.

This emphasis on the importance of human dignity extends to every aspect of 1MISSION’s work. We seek to create a workplace that affirms the image of God in every employee. We seek to honor

our supporters and trip participants, not as means to an end, but first and foremost as people who bear the image of God, who have responded to an invitation to extend God's love to those in need. Everyone has God-given dignity as an image bearer. No exceptions.

God created the world good and an integral part of his good creation is the work he has entrusted to humans.

### **DISCUSSION**

- ◆ Spend a few moments imagining what it would have been like to live in the garden before sin entered the picture. Think not just of the bad stuff that wasn't there yet, but focus on all the good stuff that was present: the tastes, the smells, the activities.
- ◆ As you consider your own life today, what are the good parts of creation you have been blessed with? What are the good parts of your job or school? What does a happy home look and feel like? What do good relationships mean to you?

### **ON YOUR TRIP**

- ◆ It'll be easy on the trip to only notice what is broken or "wrong" about the community you're working in. But all cultures, nations, and people are embedded with God's creational goodness. Be observant of things that the Mexicans do that highlight God's goodness. Be curious about things that Mexicans might do that are even better than the way we do it.
- ◆ Since we are the ones with resources, it can be easy to see ourselves as the ones solving the problems. But we're not the saviors. You're coming to partner with the family you're serving. You're here to observe and learn, not to teach. The goodness of God's creation extends all over the world and you have the opportunity to step into that goodness and the good work he's prepared for you to do.





## A Garden in the Desert

If you could plant a garden anywhere in the world, the barrios of Puerto Peñasco, Mexico, probably wouldn't be your first choice. For starters, it's hot. Especially during the summer months, the sun can be unforgiving to plants, animals, and humans alike. And then there's the sand. As far as the eye can see, it's sand and more sand.

Not exactly the Garden of Eden.

But our friend Ruben, who leads 1MISSION's community gardens initiative, is determined to change that. Ruben teaches hands-on classes at several community gardens throughout Puerto Peñasco, which include not just gardening tips but also broader community development principles. During a visit to one of these gardens, Ruben pointed out chard, carrots, radishes, potatoes, cilantro, and cabbage—an amazing variety for such a small space.

The goal is to help families understand they can plant gardens of their own, even in these harsh conditions. The fruit and vegetables they grow can help the family stay healthier, and they can also sell it to others as a new income stream. Local restaurants have started to show interest in offering this organic produce on their shelves. The possibilities are truly life-changing.

If you've met Ruben, you know he isn't just a talented gardener. He

delights in gardening. And as he generously shares that joy with his neighbors, he honors God and bears his image.

These community gardens haven't fundamentally changed the Puerto Peñasco landscape—not yet. They're still isolated pockets of green in the harsh Sonoran desert. But when you spend time in one of the gardens—in the shade of a mesquite tree, admiring the handiwork of Ruben and his friends—it's not hard to imagine what the Garden of Eden must have been like.

And it reminds us of the work God has given us to do. It doesn't have to be splashy. It won't change everything all at once. But as image bearers invited to participate in what God is doing in the world, we know that this work is a gift. And gifts are meant to be shared.





## ACT 2

# REBELLION

*So the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, “Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” To the woman he said, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” ... So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.*

*Genesis 3:14-19, 23*

The world was created good. But as you look around, you are sure to find all kinds of brokenness in this world that God made—the world that God still loves. There is poverty, down the street and around the

world. There is heartache, after a breakup or the death of a pet or a loved one. There is anger, especially at rush hour or when the TV is on. That's just scratching the surface. As the theologian Cornelius Plantinga put it, the world as we know it is "not the way it's supposed to be." Everything good has been corrupted, twisted, and broken. The world is in rebellion against God's good designs for it.

How do we make sense of this brokenness? It may be tempting to look the other way, to focus on what isn't broken, the stuff that makes us happy. And it's certainly tempting to cast the blame elsewhere, overlooking the ways our own hearts and lives are twisted. But the Bible doesn't let us off the hook that easily.

In Genesis 3, we come to the story of the very first rebellion. If we're honest, it's a familiar story because it continues to play itself out, day after day. Adam and Eve rebelled against God by eating the one fruit that God had declared off-limits. In that moment, they broke the perfect, harmonious relationships they had with God, each other, and with creation—the relationships God had established for their own good. Gone was harmony and peace and communion. Enter sin and division and death.

God's good creation was now cursed. And God's image-bearers, Adam and Eve, were given an eviction notice from the only home they'd ever known. We read that "the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken." Adam came from dust; now he would have to eke out an existence from the soil as well.

Humans rebelled against God, thus damaging their relationship with Him, one another, and creation. The effects of this rebelling extend to today.

This is a good time to recall what we learned in the last chapter, that work was an original part of God's good creation. It's important to hold onto that truth, even as we consider the ways work has been twisted.

God lets Adam and Eve know that their work will involve “thorns and thistles.” In today’s terms, he might warn students of “deadlines and Ds,” or warn those of us with office jobs of “layoffs and liabilities.” Work is now full of all kinds of physical and mental pain, boredom and stress, uncertainty and under-appreciation. Work is not the way it’s supposed to be.

As the biblical story moves on through the generations, the rebellion continues. Instead of doing the work God had given them to do—to be fruitful, subduing the earth, and stewarding what God has created—Adam and Eve’s sons and daughters circled the wagons and dug in their heels to create a self-serving, God-ignoring empire. That’s what we see in the story of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11. Instead of filling the earth and stewarding His creation, they clustered together and hoarded their resources for themselves.

All of this sounds pretty dire. Not a lot of good news in this chapter. But it’s important not to skip over it. We need to hang out here, to feel the weight of the brokenness, the extent of the rebellion.

For the families we serve, “thorns and thistles” are an everyday part of life—sometimes literally.

But even with the story of the tower of Babel, God’s not done with his people yet. He won’t let them forget who he called them to be and what he called them to do, so He scatters them across the earth. God ensures that his plan will go forward, even if he did so then and does so now in unexpected, sometimes uncomfortable ways.

Rebellion takes many forms in our lives today, just as it did then. Sin and brokenness wreak havoc in rich suburbs and poor slums, in large cities and small towns, among the elderly and the young, in both public and hidden ways. The specifics vary but the problem is universal.

For the families 1MISSION serves, “thorns and thistles” are an everyday part of life—sometimes literally. The landscapes in which they live present all kinds of challenges, whether it’s the hot desert of Puerto Peñasco or the tropical villages in Nicaragua that are prone

to hurricanes. Droughts can mean a year's income is lost; floods can mean the same. Many of the plagues of Egypt (Exodus 7-11) would sound familiar to a farmer in rural El Salvador.

In a world of widespread brokenness, community development is a slow, patient process of restoring relationships in every direction. When families participate in 1MISSION's community development programs, they are invited to learn about God's design for creation, including work. They are invited to build new friendships and strengthen existing ones. And they are invited to care for the resources that have been entrusted to them, right where they are.

There are no shortcuts, no quick fixes. It doesn't work just to throw money at a problem or to assume that once everyone becomes a Christian, poverty will cease. In the face of poverty that affects every area of life, God calls his people to a slow, patient process that takes many forms and invites everyone to participate. No benchwarmers.

### **DISCUSSION**

- ◆ How do you see and experience brokenness in your own life, your own family, your own community?
- ◆ How do you experience the curse in your job? School/Chores/Yardwork?
- ◆ When life is hard, what helps you endure?

### **ON YOUR TRIP**

- ◆ It could be easy to notice brokenness while on your trip. Because of our wealth, it is easier to mask the brokenness here. What are some ways that you see brokenness masked in your community? What are ways that you mask your own brokenness? What do we do to mask the brokenness of the created world?
- ◆ When you come to Peñasco, you'll see the effects of the fall. But these effects are everywhere, even in our own places – and it's sometimes easy to overlook them because they are familiar. Between now and the next session, pay attention to ways the curse is playing out in your life, family, community.





### ACT 3

## PROMISE

*The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”*

*Genesis 12:1-3*

Promises are important. They give us hope for the future. They ground us. They tether us to our relationships. But promises are only as good as the person making them.

After the rebellion, God’s people were a mess. They were cast from the garden, outside of God’s care and protection. They were without their home and distanced from their creator. And coming out of Babel, they were now spread across the globe. Everything was broken: their relationships with their God, with each other, and with creation. Is God going to abandon this project? Is he finally done with His creation?

How does God address this cosmic dilemma? With a promise.

In Genesis 12, God calls a man, Abram (soon to be renamed Abraham) and makes him a promise. He tells him that he is going to make him into a great nation. Abraham is surprised because he's old, and he doesn't have any land or children. How can he become a great nation? God asks Abraham to trust him and to follow him. He is going to give Abraham (and Sarah) a child, he's going to give them land, and he's going to make them a great nation. But he's not just going to do that for Abraham's sake, He's going to do that for the sake of the world. Abraham is blessed to be a blessing to the nations of the world and to point them back to Himself. Abraham and the nation God creates (Israel) are to steward this blessing and live in such a way that God's glory is made known to all the world. And one day, through the line of Abraham a Messiah (a Savior) would come who would fully restore God's people.

We have been blessed to be a blessing whether we are in the land God has called us to or while in exile.

But there's still a problem. Though blessed, God's people continue to rebel. Abraham rebels, his kids rebel, their kids rebel, and their kids rebel. You get the picture. And while there are victories along the way, there are a lot of failures and those failures lead to lots of problems for God's people. They end up outside of the promised land multiple times. They end up with foreign rulers ruling over them. They end up divided and warring against each other. But through all of this, God continues reiterating His promises. Through the descendants of Abraham, there is going to come someone who will set all things to right. He's going to come and fix all the brokenness with God, with one another and with creation.

But at the end of this act, some of the people of God are still living in exile and some are back in the promised land, but God seems

to have gone quiet. They haven't heard from Him in 400 years. They're losing hope, but clinging to a promise only solidified by the faithfulness of God.

### **DISCUSSION**

- ◆ In what ways are you experiencing exile?
- ◆ Every nation/community/city experiences both the brokenness of sin and displays the blessing of God. What ways do you see the goodness/blessing of God on display in your life and community, maybe in unexpected places?

### **ON YOUR TRIP**

- ◆ The family you serve alongside may very well have been forced to relocate in search of work, or because they were fleeing violence or political instability. They may be eager to tell you their story. Or they may not wish to share their story in detail, for a variety of reasons, including safety and emotional distress. But as you get to know them, pay attention to the ways they are seeking the peace and prosperity of the place where they are now, how they are seeking to be a blessing to their neighbors, and even to you, as you work alongside them.



## Living in Hope, Wherever We Are

Many of the families we serve have been displaced at some point in their lives. Exiled, if you will, from their home. Separated from their families, their friends, their community. Maybe they were escaping violence or looking for better opportunities. Either way, it's a common story we hear in our work.

In Jeremiah 29:4-7 we read, “This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ‘Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 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. Also, seek the peace 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.’”

The six members of the Sánchez family exemplify this beautiful passage for us (names have been changed to protect their privacy). Originally from Mexico City, this family has known the pain and disorientation of exile, but they have used these experiences to grow stronger and kinder and more generous—not less.

Miguel, the father of the family, ran a small business in their capital city neighborhood. He worked hard and was smart. The business was growing. Earning a solid income for his family, he began to hire employees, providing a livelihood for them as well. Unfortunately,

these rising fortunes caught the attention of a local gang, which wanted a slice of the pie. Things were tense for a while. Following a violent home invasion and the brief but terrifying kidnapping of Miguel, this family fled the only home they had ever known.

First they escaped to a small town far enough away where they didn't think they'd be recognized. Before long they relocated to a ranch near the border of Texas, but this move was short-lived as well. Finally, they settled in Puerto Peñasco, where they had some relatives who offered to help them get back on their feet.

Today, the Sánchez family is financially self-sustainable and are happy with the life they're building in this new city. After earning their new house through 1MISSION, they decided to paint it a hopeful bright yellow color. They're a close-knit family who enjoy playing basketball together in the nearby park. Their children are doing well in school—one is now in college!

This is a family that would never have chosen to be sent into exile. But they have chosen to make the most of it. They have put down roots. Every day we see them seeking the peace and prosperity of the city where God has sent them. We've lost track of the number of times they have told us that if we ever need anything, if they can ever do anything to serve, they're willing and eager to do so. And yes, we're happy to take them up on it.





## ACT 4

# REDEMPTION

*As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

*Matthew 9:9-13*

As we've seen in the first few chapters of this study, God created the world good, with God, people, and creation in perfect harmony. Before long, human beings rebelled, breaking relationships in every direction. But God didn't give up on his people. He promised that one day he'd send the Messiah to restore relationships, first of all with God, but also with each other and the created world.

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise. He is the Messiah that was promised for so long. In him,

we receive the gift of new life. Praise God!

But here's the thing: during his earthly ministry, Jesus didn't behave exactly how people would have expected. With each story we read in the Gospels, those who hear him teach and see him perform miracles are surprised—sometimes even scandalized! Especially the Pharisees, the religious gatekeepers of the day.

In Matthew 9, we read about Jesus calling a tax collector named Matthew to follow him. Matthew, the most unlikely follower of the Messiah, “got up and followed him.” Soon afterwards, Jesus and his disciples are at Matthew's house for a dinner party, spending the evening with a whole bunch of rowdy sinners. What does Jesus think he's doing? What kind of an example does he think he's setting? That's what the Pharisees wanted to know. So they asked him.

Jesus didn't respond by getting defensive. He didn't ignore the question. He didn't lash back at them or say something sarcastic. Instead, he spoke to the heart of the issue that's at the center of every human heart: “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Jesus was spending time with sinners not in spite of their soul-sickness but because of it. These image bearers needed healing. And wonder of wonders, they recognized that they did. The Pharisees, of course, were sick, too. But they had blinders on—blinders that allowed them to ignore their own brokenness while they went around policing everyone else's behavior.

The tragedy is not for you and me to be in need of healing; the tragedy is to be in need of healing, but to be in denial about it. Jesus didn't come to earth for the people who have it all together, the people whose lives are working out just fine. He came for those of us who know we're lost without him. Who know our

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relationships with God, each other, and the world around us are hopelessly broken if someone doesn't step in to change them. People who know we need a physician. A Savior.

Once we've been healed—once we've experienced the love of Jesus, the love that extends to us even when we're most unlovable—we are capable of being instruments of healing in the world around us. Having received a new lease on life, we are freed from sin and empowered by the Spirit to follow Jesus in all he commands: to love God with everything in us and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

The story isn't over yet, but in Jesus it's taken a decisive and irreversible turn for the better. We can experience the fullness of his life in us now, but it's also true that we still live in the "already but not yet." God's promises have already been fulfilled in Jesus, and yet the world is still marred by the effects of humanity's rebellion against the Creator.

Jesus's life, death, and resurrection reverses the curse of the Rebellion and brings healing to the world—he saves souls, but he also heals bodies and restores relationships. Though we can experience this in part today, we don't yet experience it in its fullness.

As we await the final chapter of the story God is telling, we are invited now to be Christ's ambassadors of reconciliation, called to the work of restoring relationships of all kinds. We must remember that everyone is in need of a doctor—whether we acknowledge our own need or not—and that everyone is capable of being an agent of healing. Freely we have received the healing Jesus offers. So freely we can extend that healing to others.

This ministry of reconciliation is at the heart of 1MISSION's community development work. It's why we design our programs—and build trips—in relational ways, ensuring they are participatory

for as many people as possible. This kind of work is slow. It often doesn't look big and flashy. It can be messy and misunderstood. But if we're being faithful, our lives and our ministries will look a lot like Jesus, the physician who was always willing to spend time with the sick—as much time as it takes.

Ultimately, healing is a gift. Just as Jesus offered healing to Matthew, he offers it to everyone who acknowledges their need for Him. Jesus is the true healer; we are His ambassadors. And like Jesus, we can't force anyone to be healed. Jesus offers his healing to a hurting world and he does it through his people. The invitation is there, just waiting to be accepted.

### **DISCUSSION**

- ◆ In Matthew 9, we see Jesus prioritizing spending time with people whose lives were messes, who weren't getting everything right. Who are the people in your life, your community, and the wider culture who are easy to exclude or judge? How do you think Jesus would respond to them if he were attending your school or church today?
- ◆ What are some ways that you have experienced the “already-not yet” aspect of the Good News? Where do you see redemption around you? What aspects of our world do you think would actually be worse if the world wasn't salted by the Gospel?

### **ON YOUR TRIP**

- ◆ Intentionally move towards someone (on your team, at basecamp, or on the jobsite) that you typically wouldn't engage with. Ask to hear their story and see what God teaches you through it.





## ACT 5

# CHURCH

*There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good...Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.*

*1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 14-18*

One of the best things about going to an ice cream or frozen yogurt store is the tiny spoons (or paper cups) given out for tasting. We get to try all the flavors side by side in order to choose one to settle on.

But, the tiny spoonful isn't meant to be the entire dessert. It is only a foretaste of what's to come.

So too is the church.

With the incarnation of Jesus, heaven came to earth and fulfilled what God had promised long ago: that one day he would redeem and restore His good creation. But, when we look around, it's pretty clear that this world is still broken and marred by sin and its effects on our relationship with God, others, and creation.

But something did happen with Jesus. We've experienced it. We see it around us. We feel the power of the Holy Spirit in us. We see the outworking in restored relationships, the goodness and generosity of strangers, and in community with people around us. Something has shifted with Jesus, but not fully; not finally. We're living in "the already, not yet" age. We can already experience all of the spiritual blessings in Jesus, but not yet in its fullness.

Even though Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father, he instituted his global body of believers, the Church, to be a foretaste of the coming Kingdom. Like the ice cream on that tiny spoon, the world is able to taste (if ever so briefly) the fullness of what a fully redeemed and restored creation will be like when Jesus comes back.

Community development is meant to be a tangible foretaste of the coming kingdom, an attempt to undo the ravages of sin.

The church is meant to be a foretaste of the coming Kingdom, both declaring with our words and displaying with our actions the Good News of Jesus Christ, that he has already redeemed His good creation, and though not yet fully, he will one day come back to do so.

The reason the symbols of the pointing forward arrow are the same for Israel and the church is because they have a similar function of pointing forward to a promise. Just as Israel was called to be a light

to the nations, so too the Church is called to be a light to the world. The church does this as both small, local congregations embodied in suburbs, cities, slums, villages, and hamlets around the world, but also as one unified, global community of believers.

The way the church functions is meant to point people to the coming Kingdom. Churches, and the individuals who make them up, participate in the work of the Spirit through their generosity, kindness, sacrifice, humility, joy, and peace. But not only are we a display people, we are also a declaring people who show and share the Good News of Jesus, that he came to save His people and will someday come again to fully redeem and restore all of His good creation.

The church is also both individual and corporate. You play a role as an individual, but no one person can function solely as a foretaste of the coming Kingdom. You're created uniquely to fulfill your role in the Body of Christ, but must function in collaboration with the rest of the church body. Everyone has a part that they are meant to play and the church functions best when its working together in unity, declaring and demonstrating who Christ is, what He's done, and what He's going to do.

This is why community development is so integral to the work of 1MISSION. The work is meant to be a tangible foretaste of the coming kingdom. Each initiative is an attempt to bring relief (or undoing) to the ways sin has damaged and destroyed our relationships with one another, creation, and God.

Small community gardens popping up throughout the community are a sign of the coming garden. The fresh vegetables are a sign pointing to the day when no one will go hungry. Our diabetes awareness and prevention initiative pointing to the day when our bodies will be fully healed. Old wine bottles are being repurposed into drinking glasses showing not only that discarded things can be redeemed, but also that one day there will be no more thirst. And



sewing classes, filled not only with beautiful clothing, but also with beautiful and deep relationships pointing forward to when God will mend all broken relationships.

It's already happening . . . but not yet fully.

### **DISCUSSION**

- ◆ What do you think of when you hear the word Church?
- ◆ If the church is meant to be a foretaste of the kingdom, what is your local church telling the broader world that the Kingdom is about?
- ◆ What value do you envision bringing to the local church (i.e. what body part are you)? When you envision the local church that you're going to serve alongside, what value do you see them bringing to their broader community? What are the things that you think people in the local community are uniquely equipped to do/bring/be to their community?

### **ON YOUR TRIP**

- ◆ Everyone has been given different gifts, abilities, and capacities. On your trip, how can you use these gifts to be both a blessing to your community, but also a foretaste to those who may not yet know Jesus? And how can you encourage those around you to do the same?





## ACT 6

# RESTORATION

*Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”*

*Revelation 21:1-5*

In this brief study, we’ve covered a lot of ground. We started with God’s good creation, where relationships of all kinds were in perfect harmony. Then came the rebellion, when sin entered the world. But God didn’t give up on his people or his plan. He made a promise, a

promise that was fulfilled through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. After the ascension of Jesus, the people of God were given the gift of the Holy Spirit, empowering the church to continue the work of reconciliation in every direction.

That's the story in which we find ourselves today. A lot has already happened. But not everything. The final restoration is yet to come, and that's where we now turn.

As we consider what awaits us, it's important to say that the Bible doesn't make all the details of the final restoration perfectly clear. But we do get very important glimpses. And as we await the day everything changes once and for all, these glimpses of our glorious future give us hope, shaping the way we live here and now.

In Revelation 21—the second to last chapter of the Bible—John writes about his vision of “a new heaven and a new earth.” He writes about “the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.” Just as Jesus “moved into the neighborhood” in his incarnation, in the final chapter of history, God's dwelling place will once again be with his people. And what changes when God moves into the neighborhood for good? Every tear is wiped away. Everything is made new.

We're living in “the already, not yet” age. We can already experience all of the spiritual blessings in Jesus, but not yet in its fullness.

As the Church, we don't have the power to wipe away every tear. We don't have it in us to make all things new. Only God the Father can do that, and he will do it through Christ by the power of the Spirit.

But there is a job for us to do in the meantime. As we live our lives—going to work or school, spending time with family and friends, serving on mission trips—we are called to be signposts pointing to the King and his coming Kingdom. We are called to be ambassadors, agents of reconciliation, representing the values of a Kingdom that has not yet fully taken shape. We are also called to be a people of hope, trusting in the promises of God and in His

faithfulness to keep those promises. Hope is contagious.

As you come to serve with 1MISSION alongside local families, we invite you to come with a posture of humility and hope. We can serve with humility and hope, knowing that God is the one who brings about the final restoration. It's not up to us. And this good news frees us to be generous and loving with those God has placed in our life, entrusting these image bearers to Him.

When you drive on the bumpy, sandy back streets of a place like Puerto Peñasco, it may not seem like there's much life. In the face of such poverty, hope may seem in short supply. But there's something happening beneath the surface. If you slow down and pay attention, you can see it. You can feel it in your bones. Through lives of quiet, faithful service, seeds are being planted and are taking root. Like the mustard seeds Jesus taught about in Matthew 13, it's what looks small and insignificant in the world's eyes that is actually most important in the economy of God's Kingdom.

One day Jesus will come back to fully redeem and restore His good creation thereby doing away with all poverty: material, physical, relational, and spiritual.

These seeds are being planted quite literally through community gardens. But it also happens metaphorically in a million different ways, as image bearers do what is theirs to do. In all of this, we see a foretaste of the coming Kingdom. There is a lot we don't know about the future Garden City, but in terms of harmony in every direction, we know it will be like the Garden of Eden. But it won't be a mere carbon copy. It'll be something new, something that represents God's redemptive work in and through his people.

In Revelation 22, we are given the image of "the river of the water of life" and "the tree of life" on its banks. We're told that "the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." The very presence of

God will illuminate the city: “There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.”

This is our hope. This is our future. It’s the final act in the story God is telling. And like that big bowl of guac we mentioned earlier, it’s best shared.

### **DISCUSSION**

- ◆ What do you imagine the new heavens and the new earth being like?
- ◆ When you think about the day when all things are made new, what “things” first come to mind?

### **ON YOUR TRIP**

- ◆ While on your trip, pay attention to the broken things that will be made new. Look for signs of new creation in unexpected places.
- ◆ When you return home, pay attention to how you see the world differently. What are the things you noticed in Mexico that have altered the way you see and engage with the world you regularly live in?

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