

01.07.24  
Ethic of Participation  
Sermon Notes

Passages Used in Sermon:

Genesis 1:1-2

Genesis 2:4-15

Genesis 2:20

Genesis 1:26-31

Genesis 2:15

Genesis 3:8-9

Philippians 2:5-11

Ethic of Participation

- This is our Ethic Statement→
  - The Story of the Bible is the story of a Creator God who chooses to re-create with his creation. He's a God who chooses Participation.

I won't rehash the entire sermon in these notes but I do want to make sure we have a solid understanding on this...

→The Bible is the story of God who made everything from nothing. Yahweh is the creator (the only one who can make something from nothing) and as the creator he invites us (his creation) to participate with him in creating something out of the something he made.

- Within the Bible's creation narrative (Genesis 1 & 2) the Bible outlines the seven days of creation and within his work one thing stands apart from everything else that was made... humanity.
- Humanity is made differently than everything else.
  - Adam receives something that nothing else does... the Image of God...
  - And then is blessed to dominate all other things in creation.
    - Be fruitful and multiply
    - To fill the earth
    - To have dominion over all creation
      - The way the Bible describes our origin in creation, there is something very unique about our standing in creation. We are unlike the rest of the created cosmos, we alone have been given God's image.
- After Adam's formation the story continues and then God does something interesting. Before the fall occurs (The Fall is when sin enters into the world) God gives Adam work to do in his garden. God is already calling Adam to co-create with him within the world.
  - Gen 2:15- The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to **work it and keep it**.
  - Gen 2:20- The **man gave names** to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field.
    - Naming something was a sign of having authority over something.
- It is very vital for us to see that all of this takes place before the fall because...

- Participation with God in creation was God's original design. It was HIS every intention for us! Participating with God is the design. We may think that work is not from God but this is not the story that is told. Participation with God is NOT...
  - A product of sin...
  - A product of our fallen condition....
  - Or even a necessary/kind act of God in his redemptive plan for humanity...
    - Participation with God in his creation was God's design!
    - Art Lindsley→ Vice President of Theological Initiatives @ Institute for Faith Work & Economics
      - "While only God can create something out of nothing, we can create something from something – and are called to this creative task."
    - J.R.R. Tolkien called himself a "Sub-Creator"
- It is God's decision and his design that he created humanity to participate with Him in this world.

I want us to begin 2024 with this in mind because a strong Ethic of Participation can change our entire outlook on life. It is the ultimate joy of every soul (whether they know it or not) to participate in creation with the God who made all of it. An Ethic of Participation is more than enough to...

- Guide us in our lifelong pursuit of Jesus.
- Help us understand God's generous character.
- Help us to shape our most basic worldview on what the purpose of life is (participation with God in creation).
- Get us through all of life's joys and pains.
  - 2024 will come at us fast but if we have a developed Ethic of Participation with God we find how valuable every second with him can be!

2024 can be a year where we realize that everything we go through can be part of God's work in our lives, in our city and in his work of bringing the Kingdom on Earth. I am so excited about what is in front of us this year... I want to participate in the work God has invited me into and I hope you have the courage to jump into it as well.

Reflection Questions...

- If God is calling you to participate in his creative work today,
  - What are you building with the something he has given you?
  - How are you participating in God's work in your daily life? In the people you live life with? In your family? At your job?
  - Are you doing anything with the something God has entrusted you with?
- How can you use an ethic to shape the way you live your life?

God made You to participate in his creative work. He has called you, equipped you and has promised to be with you through the work. If you struggle with accepting this about you read John 14-16 and realize how close, intimate and equipping Holy Spirit promises to be.

01.14.24  
Ethic of Participation Week 2  
Sermon Notes

Last week's Big Question was...

- What are you building in your life?
  - If the Biblical narrative is one that trains those who belong to God that they were made to participate in creation with God, we should look at our lives and think about what we are building in them.
    - Am I building something with God?
    - Am I even aware of what that means?
    - If you're a Christian ask yourself... is the way I am living "evidencing" that I make my life's decisions with God or do I really know, deep down inside, that I make all of my decisions without ever considering what God may be building in my life?
    - The purpose of asking yourself these questions is for you to see the truth, not to throw yourself in shame. If you realize that the truth is not that you are working in step with God, change is possible.

This week's Big Question was...

- If you agree with the Biblical narrative of God's participation... **How do we build with him?**
  - This week we explored the how.
    - How would I even do this?

To answer this question we continued the Bible's narrative and we landed on two stories that are designed to contrast one another...

Tower of Babel (Genesis 11) & Abram's Call (Genesis 12)

Babel

- Genesis 11:1-4
- The Contrast between the heart expressed in Babel and the Heart found in Abram's call is in the two things that Babel said they wanted and the outcome they wanted to avoid, both found in verse 4...
  1. Let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens...
  2. And let us make a name for ourselves
    - Outcome they wanted to avoid→ lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.
      - Let's break this down...
- Building a Tower
  - The English translation here is correct but the Hebrew is much more suggestive of the issue that the people are dealing with. The word translated Top is the Hebrew word for Head (שׂר) and the word painting that we get is that the people wanted to build their own humanity. If they built this tower that reached "in the

heavens” then they could replace God and be their own Gods. This expressed desire is a window into their rebellion from God and His way of living.

- Making a Name
  - It might seem comical to us as modern people. We might laugh at their ability to build a tower into heaven but before we allow ourselves to laugh at them, let's consider that the human condition has not changed and still to this day humanity does the same exact thing! Humanity that lives apart from God is still in a never ending quest to make something of ourselves. We live in New York City's shadow and if you can make it here you can make it anywhere, right? How many of us have been brought to Jersey City because of our ambition? How many of us are more focused on the things that we've made most important in our lives (career, family, money, security, advancement, comfort) so that we can finally feel like we're somebody?
- Another critique that I'll include here (I included in the sermon as well)...
  - Babel is also a commentary on ideologies such as Humanism and Social Contract Theory in that the Bible teaches believers that human unity is not our ultimate goal in life. To be clear, followers of Jesus are called to live at peace with people, we are to be good citizens and to serve our enemies but absolute human unity divorced from God is not our goal. God made us to be intelligent and when unity is divorced from God, in rebellion to him, the outcome of what we make is always destructive. Our building of a new Humanity in our image, and not in God's, is always destructive no matter how much virtue signaling is involved. A Christian's unity is to what God calls appropriate and righteous, no matter what may be popular in our days.

God then comes and does the very thing that they were worried about.

- Genesis 11:5-9
  - God comes down (the joke here is that though we think we're building something massive, it's too small for God to see from heaven and so he needs to step down to see it)...
  - Confuses human language and disperses them on the earth.
- I love to point out that in God's commentary on humanity, God speaks about how intelligent humanity is and that is because He made us this way. We are made to re-create in God's creation and as a race we are violently smart. In God's responses, he did not make us dumb he slowed us down. God made us differently from the rest of creation and he does not change what He made.

Adam's Call

- Genesis 12:1-3
- God goes to a man from Haran (map seen below) and he calls a nobody! Who is Abram? A completely new person we've never met before and here is the commentary...
  - When God calls Abram he says this...
    - Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will

bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

- God says...
  - Go→ Leave EVERYTHING YOU KNOW to follow a place that ***“I’ll Show You (this is super important but not going to get into it today, Abram did not know where he was going. He had to continuously rely on God’s voice)”***
    - Your Family
    - Your Land
  - Then He says that in Abram’s “Go-ing” God would do exactly what the people from Babel were trying to do for themselves...God would make Abram into...
    - A Great Nation
    - A Blessing For the Whole World
    - A Great Name!
- In God’s design for humanity the importance, significance and greatness comes from Listening to God and Obeying him. What made Abram (means Father) turn into Abraham (means Big Father) was his obedience to God’s voice. In Abram’s willingness to participate with what God was doing and not what he thought was best. Hebrews 11 says this about Abraham...
  - 8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.
- God is what makes humanity great. We cannot build anything that really matters outside of building what God is building. Building with God alongside you isn’t the picture here. Building by yourself and hoping it’s what you should be building is not the picture here. Building what God is leading you to build is what this life is meant for. It is also the thing that brings us the most joy.
- Abram gives God four things...
  1. Abram ***Listens*** to God’s direction
  2. Abram ***Trusts*** in God’s leading
  3. Abram gives God ***Time***→ Abram followed God’s direction for the rest of his life
  4. Abram gave God his ***Yes***
    - If we are people who are serious about building with God, our job is to allow God to teach us these four things.

Our Phrase for this two week Narrative Study has been this...

The story of the Bible is the story of an Uncreated, Creator God who chooses to recreate with his creation. Because He’s a God who chooses participation.

This is what we were made for and I urge us all to consider what we are building and how we may build it with God.

### Ways to Listen to the Holy Spirit's Voice in your life...

- Through the Bible
- Through spending time in Prayer quieting yourself
- A Simple Phrase or Word may come to mind
- See a Picture in your minds eye
- A song lyric might come to mind
- God might move you through feeling an emotion
- The Spiritual Gifts, especially Word of Knowledge
- Hearing Testimony that hits in the right way
- Advice from a friend/stranger

Map of Where Haran was from Israel



01.21.24  
Ethic of Participation Family Meeting  
Sermon Notes

These were the main ideas that we focused on during the Vision portion of this year's Family Meeting. This is what CityLife will endeavor to be about in 2024. If CityLife is your Home then we invite you to jump deeper into our pursuit of Jesus. If you are exploring faith, consider if these things are what you're looking for.

[Here is the link to the Video and audio recording of the Vision Portion of our meeting.](#)

No church can stand for everything, do everything that could be done in Christ at all times. Everybody needs to find clarity on how to form their disciples. Over the years, CityLife has disciplined people along the Core Values that help to shape our pursuit as a corporate body. Here are our Core Values and a statement of identity for our people...

- **Missional Community**

- A CityLifer is someone who lives out their Identity by living on mission with an intentional group of people...
- A CityLifer spurs other believers to keep living out their identity as God's New Humanity as Holy Spirit filled people.
- How the Church will make space for this Core Value→
  - CityLife will continue to identify MC leaders and train/coach them towards building small groups that can live out the Christian faith with intentionality.
  - CityLife will continue to structure our MC groups and provide oversight and clarity in vision.

- **Discipleship**

- A CityLifer is someone who longs to be shaped by a clearer and more compelling vision of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.
  - We define a disciple like this...
    - A devout follower of Jesus who is becoming like Him in character and priorities.
- How the Church will make space for this Core Value→
  - We will finish shaping and then clearly communicate a pathway for disciple relationships to take place. Some of discipleship is always informal and organic but our church structure needs to make room for these relationships to flourish.

- **Giving It Back**

- A CityLifer is someone who shares what they've been given (time, treasure, talents) because all that we've been given can contribute to building the Kingdom.
- How the Church will make space for this Core Value→
  - We will conduct our church's finances with integrity so that CityLife remains responsible with every cent that we are given. CityLife will always



be looking for partnerships/ministries/organizations in Jersey City where we can bring all of what we have so that Kingdom work is done.

- **Being In Our City**
  - A CityLifer knows that they are their neighbor's neighbor and spends time with people outside of CityLife with gospel intentions.
  - How the Church will make space for this Core Value→
    - CityLife will always count the cost when scheduling programs and events. We will restrain our programming so that we can be active in our city and with our neighbors.
- **Partnering With Our City**
  - A CityLifer is someone who is looking out for ways to prop up what God is already doing in Jersey City. He was here before us and will be here after us... we find where he's at work
  - How the Church will make space for this Core Value→
    - Will create partnerships with organizations that share vision with us. God is at work in our city and we are open to partnerships that make sense.

I also presented the Preaching theme for 2024. Here it is.

- **Preaching Theme**
  - Normalize- to allow or encourage to become viewed as normal.
    - Hearing about Jesus
      - Hearing about Jesus and other people's testimonies is the most normal thing for a devoted disciple of Jesus because we are people who listen before we speak. Hearing about Jesus is normal because I'm filling my heart and mind with Him.
    - Talking about Jesus
      - Talking about Jesus and sharing my testimony is the most normal thing for a devoted disciple of Jesus to do because if I am trying to live authentically I have to offer what is most important to me and that is Jesus. How can someone really know me if they don't know what is most important to me? Of course Jesus is what I talk about, I love him.
    - Experiencing the Holy Spirit
      - Experiencing the move of the Spirit is the most normal thing for a devoted disciple of Jesus because my entire life is lived through my vital union with Him (John 15). Everything I do and accomplish is only made possible because the Spirit empowers me to participate with Him.

### **Projects for 2024**

- **Discipleship**
  - CityLife's Staff and Board will finish shaping and then clearly communicate a pathway for disciple relationships to take place. Some of discipleship is always informal and organic but our church structure needs

to make room for these relationships to flourish. By the end of 2024 CityLife will have clear Vision around how we feel called to disciple our people and a well communicated pathway to achieve it.

- Hear More of Your Stories
  - We want to make space, especially during Sunday Mornings, to hear the testimonies of what God is doing in our lives. Testimonies carry power and we want to hear them. We encourage all of you to be bold in sharing with leadership what God is doing in your lives so that we can openly encourage one another.
- Trainings
  - We want to equip everyone who makes CityLife into their home to be more informed about the Christian life. Sometimes our lives don't match what we read in the Bible because of a lack of being invested in (not always but sometimes). We want to make sure we are training our community to be able to live to their fullest. The trainings that are happening this year are...
    - Preaching
    - Leadership
    - Prayer Ministry
      - There may be more if we have any burning desires around a shared area of our faith. Bring me some of your ideas.
- Outreach
  - CityLife will never find a vibrant outreach if we are not praying for it and having conversations. For years now leadership has talked and prayed about finding something that sticks with our church and now we feel it's time to open these conversations and meetings to the whole congregation. Join us as we build meetings throughout the year where we come together to pray into our outreach efforts in Jersey City.
- Laws
  - This year we are formally entering into partnership with Laws who are moving to Spain with the Alliance. We want to support them with money and with our presence there with them. We'll be communicating throughout the year about their work and further possibilities for us to join them in Spain.
- See Conversions and Baptisms
  - We are disciples who are called to make more disciples. Let us be about bringing people to faith this year so that we can participate with God in his mission to call the lost.

CityLife, every year is another opportunity to see what God will be up to in our church and I am very excited to see what happens in 2024. Let's continue to be people who expand our devotion to God and all that he has for us to do. Together we can see more Kingdom work done than we could do alone. I'm excited and I hope you are too. If you have any questions or want to have further conversations I am here for it! Please email me @ [Pedro Reis](#) .

Pedro Reis

Lead Pastor of CityLife Church of the Christian and Missionary Alliance