

GOING DEEPER SESSION: CHILD PROTECTION

World Vision's Child Friendly Space: Helping Children to be Seen and Heard in Disasters and Emergencies

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Biblical Basis for Child Protection

God bestows rights to all children. Boys and girls alike are born with dignity having been created in His image and likeness (Genesis 2). From the very moment of conception, God confers value to human being, boy and girl, man and woman. He further demonstrates this utter worth by sending His beloved Son Jesus Christ to live with people and later allowing him to die on the cross, to save them from sin (Matthew 25:31-28:18).

In the creation, He commands that man and woman must be stewards of everything under their helm. Hence, as adults, we are given the duty to care for, nurture and protect children. The mandate to every individual is to preserve the dignity that God has given to the children. Indeed, God's extends this benefit not just to children within the families but even to the stranger and the orphan (Deuteronomy 24:17)¹

Jesus Christ emphasized the need to honor the role of children in the community as models of faith. He Himself instructed the disciples to welcome the children in His name (Mark 9:33-27, 10:13-16, Matthew 18:1-5, 21:14-16). He also warns impunity to those who would let the little ones to stray.

To realize our vision for the fullness of life for every child, it is therefore imperative that we work together to create an enabling environment where every boy and girl is raised in a manner that realizes God's purpose and vision. Every child deserves to be loved, educated in truth and values, and be safeguarded by his or her family and community. The family, school, church and the community at large must altogether own and fulfill this responsibility.

Is God a Humanitarian?²

Biblical anthropology for the humanitarian

The question begs other questions. Who is God? What is a humanitarian? What is a human for that matter? And, what difference does it make to the humanitarian community anyway?

We could fill this space by listing all the titles and descriptions of who God is. But would we know God? We may even be able to draw some deep theological conclusions from studying our list. But would we know God?

There is a world of difference between *knowing about* someone, especially God, and *knowing* someone. Knowing anyone, especially God is based on a relationship of trust, understanding and listening. We can know 'about' God simply as an academic exercise...but we will not 'know' him.

So, how does a human being living in a three dimensional world get to 'know' a 4/5/6 - dimensional God? How do we get to really know a God who is beyond a concept, and idea?

The answer is in God himself.

And in the answer we get a glimpse into human nature and the heart of humanitarianism.

God chooses to communicate aspects of His own being. This is what theologians call the 'communicable attributes of God.' There are aspects of God that cannot be imparted to humans, though we benefit from them. For example, aspects like, 'omniscience - knowing all things', 'omnipresence - being in all places at the same time', 'omnipotence – all powerful.' There are however aspects of God that he does impart to us. In fact they are the very things that define our humanity and mark us out as humans – different from the rest of the animal world.

Whatever we believe about the beginning of human existence, something marks the human as different to the rest of the known universe. What is the difference? To people of faith, the human being is different from other animals because God has breathed something of his own being into us. He breathed into us something of his own nature and personhood. And, it is this that makes us human. "And God said, 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.'" (Genesis 1:26)

God is not contained by physical form. So, what then does his image or likeness look like? And, in what way

are we like him? In Genesis 2:7 we read, 'Then the Lord God formed man of the dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.' If you like, we are his species, created in his image.

We could explore a number of attributes of God that come through his creative breath. But for now, to help us see how this works in practice, we will look at four. God is love. God is creator. God is sovereign. God is truth / light.

Love

God is a social being. He discusses amongst himself, 'Let us make man in our image.' God looked at man and saw that it was not good that he be alone. In being alone, man would not reflect the social and loving nature of God.

God is love (1John 4:7-21) and he breathed into humans the nature to love. He breathed into men and women... and their offspring (the human trinity) his own loving nature.

To be truly human is to love and be loved. We know the stories of children, and adults deprived of love...what it does to their personhood and sense of meaning and value. Without love we are dysfunctional beings. Without love we are something less than fully human. We are each, persons designed to relate to other persons and in doing so we become more complete.

Creativity

We find that one of the first human tasks was to name the animals. In Genesis 2:19, "...formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called the living creature, that was its name." Naming something – a child, a pet, or a paper – takes enormous creativity if you want it to mean something or signify something important.

Where did the human get this creativity? It is God – breathed. God is creative and he has given us something of his creative spirit. The ability to find new solutions to old problems; develop new and more meaningful ways of seeing things around us; or even to see things we have not seen before. We are designed to be creative.

Sovereignty and responsibility

We have been charged along with the first humans, to "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the

sky, and over every living creature that moves on the earth." (Gen. 1:28). We were not charged with the task of being fascist dictators over the earth as if it was our toy to do violence as we wish, but to work with God in bringing it under the rule of harmony...to set it in order like a piece of jewellery.

God is sovereign and he breathed something of his sovereign nature into humans. We are designed to be in charge of our own destiny, not victims of others' whims and fancies or even our own frailties. Victor Frankl, in his classic *'Man's Search for Meaning'* explores human nature at its best, even in the Nazi prison camps. There were those who psychologically and spiritually allowed themselves to become victims of the oppressors, destroying their very essence. And then there were those who chose not to be victimized and somehow rose above the dehumanizing oppression. It's a classic piece, you should read it.

It is in our nature to harmonise with God in continuing the work of creation. We have been granted sovereignty over both our own lives and the world in which we live...to bring it under divine order. Why then do we destroy it and ourselves?

Truth

Man and woman were placed in an open and transparent relationship with God and with each other. Even to the point that their nakedness was unknown before God and themselves. There was no defensiveness or furtiveness because there was nothing to hide.

At some point the humans were seduced by the lie that they themselves were god. And, in doing so they separated themselves from the very nature of God and stepped into darkness. Then they were ashamed and furtive.

Truth and light were meant to have been part of human nature, but instead we distort the truth to make it comfortable, destroy trust in each other and seek position and power over others rather than seek the light of transparency and truth.

What is a human?

We are only truly human when we are being loving, creative, responsible and truthful. That's the way we were designed.

It could be said that the more human we are, the more we are like God. We have here just four of the aspects to human personhood and they are reflections of the

nature of God. God is love. God is Creator. God is Sovereign. And God is Light / Truth.

Christians believe that Jesus the Christ left behind the Spirit of God to recreate in us the image of God. The key role of the Spirit of God is to breathe into us again the very nature of God. When we seek to align our human spirit with the Spirit of God, we bear fruit that looks like God. Look again at the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. Do they not sound familiar to the four dimensions we explored above...and more?

As an indicator of where I stand, I ask myself, "Am I becoming more or less loving; more or less creative more or less in charge of my own destiny; and more or less able to manage the truth?" I ask the same questions of my team.

So, what does this mean for the humanitarian and the humanitarian community?

Indicators of humanitarian success

Our success in saving and building lives and livelihoods is ultimately measured by what of God has been breathed into our programs, policies, partnerships and more particularly the communities we claim to support.

Within this framework of human nature we find a framework of humanitarian endeavour. It guides the design and monitoring of our effort. We are required, therefore, to ask of our programs and policies the questions:

- Is this community becoming more loving? – towards themselves, each other and their neighbours.
- Is this community becoming more in charge of their own destiny? Or are they more dependent? More able to move their assets and circumstances from chaos to order?
- Is this community more creative now than when we first partnered with them?
- And, are they more able to manage truth now? More realistic about their own vulnerability and environment and capacity?

These are the true indicators of transformation and development. What should we do with this framework? Three things:

- I. Apply it to my own self discipline and thought.

2. Apply it to the way I relate to those I love and work with.
3. Develop a high level framework for DM&E that's as practical as it is evocative.

So, is God a humanitarian?

If our humanitarian endeavour is established and guided by love, creativity, responsibility and truth then our chances of successfully partnering with God and with each other are great. Not to do so is to dehumanise ourselves, our partners and those we seek to serve.

¹ *Protecting Children: A Biblical Perspective on Child Rights*, World Vision International 2002.

² *John West, HEA Associate Director. H-Capacity.*