

THE PURPOSE OF HUMANITY

Leader pages on pp. 106-109

THE POINT:
GOD CREATED US TO SERVE AND HONOR HIM.

GENESIS // 1:1-5, 26-31

¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. ³ Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." There was an evening, and there was a morning: one day.

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²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth." ²⁷ So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female.

MEMORY VERSE

²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth."

²⁹ God also said, "Look, I have given you every seed-bearing plant on the surface of the entire earth and every tree whose fruit contains seed. This will be food for you, ³⁰ for all the wildlife of the earth, for every bird of the sky, and for every creature that crawls on the earth—everything having the breath of life in it—I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. ³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good indeed. Evening came and then morning: the sixth day.

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KEYWORDS

Created (v. 1)—The Hebrew word (*bara*) describes the activity of making.

Image (v. 26)—Humanity’s reflection of God. It cannot be reduced

to a list. Instead, it encompasses every aspect of our being.

Subdue (v. 28)—To bring into subjection. This is possible as one stands under God’s authority.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN ABOUT HUMANITY FROM THE CREATION STORY?

Taking out the trash. Washing the dishes. Sweeping the floors. Washing and folding the laundry. Cleaning the bathrooms. All of these are household chores that are disliked but still must be done. As kids, many of us might have dreaded some of these responsibilities, but at the end of the day, they didn't require much of us, especially if we found a way to dole them out to our siblings.

As we become adults, we know firsthand that responsibility increases, and owning responsibility is a marker of maturity. Responsibility is not a bad thing! In fact, God has built responsibility into us. He gave it to us when He put us on the earth. He coded us for it and gave us the tools to carry it out. And it is up to us to recognize what that responsibility is—and carry it out.

We now have a clearer understanding of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It's time to learn more about His purpose for creating humanity. To do so, let's go back to the beginning in Genesis 1.

God Created Everything // Genesis 1:1-5

When we want to communicate with an audience, it is necessary to keep three things in mind: What background knowledge does the audience already have? What new information should they walk away with? How do we bridge the gap between what the audience knows and what we want them to learn as a result of our communication?

With these things in mind, think about the original audience who would have read Genesis 1. Tradition tells us that Moses probably wrote it, which means it was first read by a group of people who were most likely still wandering in the desert after being freed from slavery in Egypt. These Israelites had never known a place to call home that didn't include either the desert or slavery.

The Israelites were surrounded by groups of people who were settled and established civilizations, including the Egyptians,



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Canaanites, and Hittites. If these groups were perceived as more “civilized,” then maybe the stories of their gods were more established too. Maybe the Egyptians were right: the world was birthed out of a cosmic egg. And then there was the Mesopotamian belief to consider: all we know was created from the carcass of one of the deceased gods.

Genesis 1 reveals a wholly different account, one that quickly cuts to the chase. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (v. 1). It’s almost as if the writer were saying, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, “Listen, I know you’re hearing all kinds of confusing information from all kinds of people. Let me tell you who is really in charge, what He did, and how you can know Him.”

WHAT IMPACTS YOU MOST ABOUT THIS FIRST DAY OF CREATION?

The biblical worldview is unique. Not only do we know who created everything, but we can also have a personal relationship with the God of creation. In fact, God invites us to have a relationship with Him. Through Jesus, we have access to the Father, the Creator of the Universe. Jesus is in a special position to do that for us because He is one with the Father, and He was present at creation.

If we look up at the night sky, we will see a carpet of stars, most of which would make our sun look tiny. If we look down below our feet with a microscope, we will see an entire ecosystem of bacteria that work together to make sure plants can grow. God did all that simply by His word. And the Creator of all of that has invited us into a relationship with Him, to know Him deeply, and to remain in Him forever.

God Created Us in His Image //

Genesis 1:26-27

To be made in the image of God means humanity was made with something the rest of creation doesn’t have. Think about what makes us different from the dog lying on your floor or the cat curling up by the window. Our ability to think, reason, and process morality is different. We also have the capacity to adapt and tame the land around us. But the most unique thing about us is that we were created to be God’s representatives.



DIGGING DEEPER IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

We use icons every day. We tap on the small images on our phones that represent apps. We are also familiar with religious icons. For example, the image of the cross may cause us to contemplate Jesus’ resurrection.

In Genesis 1:26-27, the word translated as “image” is the Hebrew word *selem*. The word is used sixteen times in the Old Testament, and most of the time it is used negatively. For example: “You must drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you, destroy all their stone images and cast images, and demolish all their high places” (Num. 33:52). However, in Genesis 1, God was not talking about carved images, icons, or apps on phones. He was talking about us, and He said something amazing about how He created us to serve and honor Him.

How does it make you feel to know God created you in His image?



God made everything, but He made humanity with the unique responsibility of being His representatives on earth.

As His image-bearers, we were created to rule over the animals and over the earth. In verse 26, the Hebrew word “rada” is translated rule and means “to subjugate, to have dominion, or to reign.” Humans made in God’s image are capable of thinking, discerning, and making choices as God’s ruling representatives, governing the earth in His place. In caring for God’s creation, we should seek to use—not abuse or misuse—what God has provided us.

God has provided renewable and nonrenewable natural resources for humanity to use. As God’s appointed rulers, we should seek His wisdom as we make decisions about the use of the earth’s resources. If decisions are made with shortsightedness, we cannot expect to “rule ... the whole earth” (v. 26) with integrity as God intended. God gave all of us the responsibility to take care of the earth, and we are to use the earth’s resources for the betterment of humanity. Prayer and godly counsel are needed as we seek to rule the earth.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN ABOUT GODLY CHARACTER FROM GENESIS 1:26-27?

When the world looks at us, they shouldn’t see people simply living for themselves. They should see people carrying out the highest calling imaginable—displaying the image of the God who made us and doing everything we can to bring Him glory.

God Commissioned Us to Care for Creation // Genesis 1:28-31

As beings created in His image, God didn’t give humanity an elevated position in creation to sit and bask in. He tasked us with being caretakers and with living in a way that honors Him. God gave three tasks in verses 28-30. First, be fruitful and fill the earth. Second, subdue the earth. And finally, relish everything that God made because He made it all to be enjoyed.

We are called to fill the earth and tend to it. But this command requires more than just populating the earth. It requires spreading God’s image far and wide. These commands did not go away after sin entered our world. We are still to take charge of the earth, but it requires hard work. Ruling over creatures also comes with its own set of unique challenges. The work can be exhausting, but it can also be very rewarding. God blesses us as we take

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charge of what He's given us in a way that glorifies Him.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE OUR RESPONSIBILITY FOR TAKING CARE OF THE WORLD GOD CREATED?

The word used in verse 31 for "saw" carries the idea of looking with the intention of making a judgment. As soon as God's creation was complete, He appraised it. He had only one judgment: it was "very good."

Christians living in the world God made have the unique opportunity to exemplify the kind of life God created us to live. Think of how blessed we are. We get to know our Creator in a personal way, we get to care for His creation, and we get to be His image-bearers. This realization leads us to take our station seriously. It changes the way we see the people around us because they, too, were created to be image-bearers. It changes the way we see the earth around us because we have been tasked to care for it. It changes the way we see ourselves because we have within us the very markings the Creator gave us to represent Him.

DID YOU KNOW?

The earliest songs sang by Africans enslaved in America were Negro spirituals. Our ancestors were taken from their land, culture, and families, but slavery did not take away their music. As years passed, the slaves adopted Christianity, the religion of their masters. Their faith in God helped them live through the oppression of slavery, and the spirituals reflected their hope in God and their resolve to trust in God to see them through. In addition, some spirituals were used as communication tools to warn about an upcoming plan to escape to freedom through the Underground Railroad. One of the best known spirituals of all time is "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands." The creation story in Genesis 1 reminds us of this truth. Although this song was written by a slave whose name we will never know, we can tell from the lyrics that the author trusted that God is sovereign and in charge despite his or her circumstances.²

What helps you to trust in the sovereignty of God as our Creator?

LIVE IT

How can we express our appreciation to God as the One who created us in His image?

We are God's creation, and it is an honor to be image-bearers who represent Him. Being made in the image of God is a tremendous blessing and a huge responsibility. No other creature God made has this distinction. Therefore, we should honor the One who honored us when He created us. Consider the following action steps to live out the principles in this lesson.

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- **Praise.** Take a few minutes to thank God for creating you, then thank Him for creating you in His image. Ask for His help to live out this great privilege and responsibility.
- **List.** Write down a few characteristics that God's image-bearers should have and evaluate yourself on them. How can you better represent the Lord?
- **Disciple.** Make a plan to disciple two people you can reach out to and help to be like God.

DAILY READINGS

1. ALL VALUED BY GOD // PSALM 139:14

What an honor it is to be God's image bearers! David beautifully expressed delight in this by saying, "I will praise you because I have been remarkably and wondrously made. Your works are wondrous, and I know this very well" (Ps. 139:14). All humans have value to God, even the people we don't like. This realization should impact the way we love God and the way we treat others. When you are tempted to look down on someone or think you are better than another for some reason, remember these verses.

Take time to remember all of God's works are wonderful. Ask Him to help you to love others as He loves.

2. GOD OUR PROVIDER // GENESIS 1:29-30

I really enjoy reading biographies to learn how people achieved their success. Some biographies lead readers to believe the person is self-made. But the reality is none of us makes it alone. In Genesis 1:29-30, God provided everything that was needed for humans to be successful on the earth. God not only provided what was needed, but He also provided clear directions. Verses 29-30 point to some ways God blessed the first humans by listing the plants, seeds, and fruits He provided for food. God is the benevolent Provider, and He ensures both humans and animals will have all they need to survive. The self-made person is a myth, but the God-blessed person is a reality.

Spend time thanking God for his generous and abundant provision.

3. JESUS IN THE BEGINNING // JOHN 1:1-3

Christmas is one of my favorite times of the year. It is the time when we celebrate the birth of our Savior, gather with family and friends, and give generously in the same way God has given to us. Although we place special emphasis on celebrating Christ's birth

as a human on earth, we must never forget He has existed from the very beginning with God. John 1:1,3 declares, "In the beginning was the Word [Jesus], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing has been created." Jesus is fully God and fully human!

As you ponder these verses, remember when you understand Jesus in Scripture, you also understand the Father.

4. A PERFECT START // GENESIS 2:15-25

The Lord created a perfect universe with a perfect garden for perfect people. After creating Adam, God placed him in the garden and gave him a job and purpose—"to work it and watch over" the garden (v. 15). Adam could eat from any tree in the garden except one—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. At the right time, God blessed Adam with the perfect woman to help him and share life with him. The Lord provided everything for them to live a blessed life.

Let this remind us God provides for us, and there is no need to look to anyone or anything to satisfy our needs.

5. A TERRIBLE DECISION // GENESIS 3:1-7

Life was good for Adam and Eve. They were completely free and unashamed in their relationship with God and with one another. They had everything they needed at their fingertips, that is, until the serpent had a deceptive conversation with Eve. The serpent made it seem that disobeying God was in her best interest, and Eve ate the fruit God had forbidden. Even worse, she shared it with her Adam, who didn't have the strength or courage to obey God's command. This terrible decision negatively impacted all of humanity as sin entered the world, but that was not the end of the story.

Let us thank God that He did not leave us sinking in sin and without hope.