

SMALL GROUPS: CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE

LOOKING AHEAD

MEMORY VERSE: Genesis 1:26-27

BIBLE STUDY: Genesis 1-2

READING: The Jewel in the Crown of God's Creation

Made in God's Image

CORE TRUTH

What is humanity?

God, the self-existent Creator, called the world into being through his infinite creativity and power. The peak of God's creative work was humankind, male and female, made exclusively in his image.

1. Identify key words or phrases in the question and answer above, and state their meaning in your own words.
2. Restate the core truth in your own words.
3. What questions or issues does the core truth raise for you?

MEMORY VERSE STUDY GUIDE

The place to begin our understanding of the nature of human beings is the beginning. What does Scripture tell us was God's original intent in creating us? These verses contain the clues to what it means to be created in God's image.

1. Putting it in context: Starting with Genesis 1:1, the creation formula for each of the six days follows a consistent pattern. How does the formula abruptly change when it comes to the creation of the man?
2. The memory verses are Genesis 1:26-27.
3. God refers to himself in the plural ("us" and "our"). What could be the reason for this?
What does this reveal about what it means to be created in God's image?
4. Verse 27 says that humankind created as "male and female" is an expression of being created in God's image. How is this another clue for how we are created in God's image?
5. What authority are humans given? What responsibility does this imply?
6. How have these verses spoken to you this week?

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Some have viewed Genesis 1 and 2 as contradictory accounts of creation. Instead, try to see Genesis 2 as an expansion and further explanation of Genesis 1:26-27. Genesis 1 is an overview, whereas Genesis 2 details the process of creation.

1. Read Genesis 1—2. The Bible begins, "In the beginning God..." What does this teach us about God?
2. What is the benediction that God pronounces over the created order prior to humankind's coming into being (1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25)?
3. How does the benediction change with the creation of humanity (1:31)?
What does this tell us about how God views humanity?
4. In Genesis 2 man is created prior to woman, and he is alone. What is not good about being alone (2:18)?
5. How does God go about filling what is missing in the man (2:18-25)?
6. When God presents the woman to the man, how does the man's exclamation (v. 23) express his fulfillment?
7. Genesis 2:24 is the classic biblical definition of marriage, quoted by both Jesus and Paul in the New Testament (see Mark 10:6-9; Ephesians 5:31). According to this verse, what are the essentials for a marriage relationship?
8. What questions do you have about these passages?
9. What verse or verses have particularly impacted you? Rewrite key verses in your own words.

READING: THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN OF GOD'S CREATION

German philosopher Immanuel Kant loved to take long walks on summer evenings to meditate and think. On one occasion he was sitting in a park when a policeman noticed that he had been there for several hours. The policeman came up to him and said, "What are you doing?" Kant answered, "I'm thinking." The policeman said, "Well, who are you?" Kant replied, "That's precisely the problem I've been thinking about."

Genesis 1–2 addresses the policeman's question: Who are we? The entire first chapter flows toward the creation of human beings. If the musical score of Genesis I were the 1812 Overture, the fireworks would fill the evening sky and the cannons would thunder their salute upon reaching Genesis 1:26-27.

THE PEAK OF GOD'S CREATIVE WORK

In Genesis I the structure of the first six days of creation reaches its apex in the creation of humans.

Only God creates. The first evidence of humanity's uniqueness centers around the word "create": "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The Hebrew word is never used to refer to human creative ability, because God can do something humans can never do—create out of nothing. The Hebrews believed that no material world existed until God called it into being.

The word "create" is also used at a crucial juncture in the creation process—when conscious life comes into being: "So God created the great creatures of the sea and every winged bird" (v. 21). And it is used three times of the creation of humans: "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (v. 27; emphasis added).

The benediction pattern. On the third day God begins pronouncing a benediction at the end of each day of his completed work. Notice that verses 10, 12, 18, 21, and 25 conclude with the same "And God saw that it was good." What does this mean? It means first of all that God is having a great time with his creative work. He is also saying, "I did a great job. This is coming out just the way I intended."

But the jewel of God's creation has not yet been set in the crown. Note that after the humans are created, the benediction changes slightly but very importantly. After God had completed all his work, he "saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (v. 31).

The creation formula. Throughout the first six days of creation leading up to the creation of humans, God uses an impersonal formula. Starting at verse 3, we read, "And God said, 'Let there be light.'" This same formula, with slight variation, is consistent throughout the passage: "Let there be a vault." "Let the water..." Let the land produce vegetation." God speaks, and it is so.

But with the creation of the humans, the formula abruptly changes. At verse 26 we read, "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.'" Human beings are the expression of the personal nature of the Creator and are therefore qualitatively different from the animal world and the rest of creation. Human beings bear the stamp of God.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE IMAGE OF GOD

The first priority of these love relationships is that we were made to be loved by God. In Genesis 2:2 we read, "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work." God paused to enjoy his creativity.

In the New Testament, salvation is spoken of in terms of entering God's rest. The rest of God is to be included in the pleasure of God and in joining the circle of his love. The oft-quoted statement of Augustine is true: "Our hearts are restless until we find our rest in thee." The first order of priority, then, is vertical—our relationship with the one who made us for himself.

Second, to be made in God's image means that success in this life is measured by our investment in horizontal relationships.

A counseling session brought this truth into focus for me. The man I had been talking with for over an hour was close to a decision. He was trying to come up with sufficient reason to restoke the fire of his dying marriage. The hostility in the marriage had become so intense that he and his wife needed a rest from each other. The respite had been welcomed by both. and he said that he was enjoying being alone. His business was stimulating and financially rewarding, and he was getting excited about an old hobby that had some promise of being lucrative. The only trouble was that if he pursued the hobby, it would most surely take him further away from his wife. Then he made a matter-of-fact statement, a kind of summary assessment of where he saw his life at that moment. He said it in such a way that the significance of it didn't seem to dawn on him. "Everything in my life seems to be going well ... except my relationships."

If our primary relationships are in disarray, what does the rest matter? To be made in the image of God is to be made for love relationships. To be made in God's image is to be made from the motive of love and for love. To be like God is to put our time and energy into loving God and others.

READING STUDY GUIDE

1. In examining Genesis I, what are the indicators that humans are the special creation of God?
2. What does it mean to be created in the image of God? How would you support this biblically?
3. What other explanations have you learned for what it means to be created in God's image?
4. What are the implications of the biblical view of humans for how we understand the worth of the individual? How might this differ from an evolutionary view of humans as higher-order animals?
5. If being created in God's image means we are made for relationship, what impact should this have on our priorities or how we measure success in life? What needs to change in your priorities?
6. What questions do you have about the reading?
7. Does the reading convict, challenge, or comfort you? Why?