

Created In God's Image And Identity

Printed Text • Genesis 1:26-31; 2:4-7

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EXAMINE God's role for humanity in the created world; CONSIDER ourselves and others as part of God's creation; and REFLECT on our role as stewards in God's creation.

In Focus

Robbie knew his entire life that one day, he would have to take over his dad's business. Jenkins Construction and Management Company has helped people build, repair, expand, and renovate their homes and businesses on the city's west side for decades. People had come to expect that if something went wrong, Mr. Jenkins would know how to handle the situation. Even those slow to trust outsiders with their home and business projects often called Mr. Jenkins for help. When Robbie was just a teenager, his dad, Robert Sr., or Bob, told him that someday he would be responsible for caring for his community. Now that the elder Bob of the famous "Jenkins Construction," was slowing down, it was time for Robbie to take over.

"Son, remember that this family business is an institution in this community. For six blocks in every direction, most of these homes and businesses have something in them that my hands built or installed. It's a big responsibility, but I know I raised you to represent the Chapman name well and to care for our community. I believe God has blessed us for so long because we've been committed to this work and have treated people right. Can you handle all that?"

"Dad, you've been telling me this since I was thirteen – I am made for this. You've had me working with you since I was old enough to hold a hammer. I'm ready to care for the community – just like you did." Robert Sr. smiled; he knew his community and legacy would be in good hands, the hands of his son, whom he had raised for this responsibility.

What is our responsibility as creations made in God's image and likeness?

Keep in Mind

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:27, KJV)

Words You Should Know

- A. Likeness** demut (Heb.) — Resemblance, fashion, or being similar to
- B. Dominion** radah (Heb.) — To rule or prevail against

Say It Correctly

Dominion. doe-MIN-yuhn

KJV

Genesis 1:26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

29 And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.

30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.

31 And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

2:4 These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens,

5 And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground.

6 But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.

7 And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

NLT

Revelation 21:1 Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground."

27 So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

28 Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground."

29 Then God said, "Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food. 30 And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—everything that has life." And that is what happened.

31 Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!

And evening passed and morning came, marking the sixth day.

2:4 This is the account of the creation of the heavens and the earth. When the Lord God made the earth and the heavens,

5 neither wild plants nor grains were growing on the earth. For the Lord God had not yet sent rain to water the earth, and there were no people to cultivate the soil.

6 Instead, springs came up from the ground and watered all the land.

7 Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person.

The People, Places, and Times

Adam. In Genesis, God created man and woman in His image, separating them from the animals, to rule the earth. Yahweh (God) formed Adam from the earth, set him over the Garden of Eden, and allowed him to have dominion over everything God created.

Background

These verses display two complementary accounts of the creation of humankind. Scholars debate whether the two accounts are a combination of multiple accounts or authors, but such speculation obscures the text's purpose and the questions that it seeks to answer. To view these verses as a compilation rather than a unified work is to give too much credence to a hypothetical situation. Humankind was created in God's image and likeness, a dignity corrupted but not eradicated by the Fall. The panoramic view of Genesis 1 comes to a sharp focus on the first human couple beginning in Genesis 2:4, lingering on God's meticulous shaping of His beloved vice-regents.

Here we see two complementary, not contradictory images of God. Genesis 1:1–2:3 reveals God to be transcendent, exerting His power and influence over the breadth of creation. Genesis 2:4 reveals God to be the immanent "God with us", who cares deeply about even the small details of human life. These twin descriptions point forward to the incarnate Jesus Christ, who in His human life also exhibited the power and influence worthy of His transcendent divinity. The same one born from the humanity of Mary controlled the weather, healed disease, and cast out demons. One must not view God's transcendence and immanence as contradictory but as necessarily entwined. It is only as both transcendent and immanent that God both cares deeply about our problems and has the power to overcome them.

At-A-Glance

1. Humanity: Vice-Regents Over Creation (Genesis 1:26–31)
2. Humanity: Living Dirt (Genesis 2:4–7)

In Depth

1. Humanity: Vice-Regents Over Creation (Genesis 1:26–31)

Here, God gives men and women dominion over the rest of creation. This is one of the meanings of the "image" and "likeness" of God in which we have been created. Theologians throughout the centuries have debated whether "image" and "likeness" reveal different aspects of human destiny, but they are two sides of the same coin. The author of Genesis means for us to know that humans were created to be like God. While God as creator is radically different from us creatures, our possession of moral abilities, mind, will, and spiritual desires makes it possible for us to pursue holiness, the core of who God is. The image and likeness of God are also integral components of human nature, meaning no one can reduce or remove that dignity from us. To

attempt to do so is to deny the mandates of creation. Instead, we as human beings are commanded to care for one another and to exert loving authority over earthly creation.

God's final declaration of "very good" over His creation reminds us of the original goodness of humanity along with the rest of creation. This is a picture of complete perfection, harmony, and order, the Hebrew shalom. It remains the mandate to humanity to seek this harmony by the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Christ.

What does this Scripture tell us about our environmental responsibilities?

2. Humanity: Living Dirt (2:4-7)

The second, more focused account of the creation of humanity adds detail to the bird's eye view offered in Genesis 1. We are reminded that we owe every gift of our creation to God. We are also reminded of the humble nature of our material origin: the dirt of the ground. As in our redemption by the Cross, Creation preaches a dual message to humanity: We are creatures of both great dignity and great humility. As Christ died for us and proclaimed our worth, so we also remember our dignity as created in the image of God. But also, as our sin necessitated Christ's death, Genesis reminds us that we are of the earth. The text even engages in wordplay to remind us of the similarity between the words "man" (Heb. adam, ah-DOM) and the "ground" (Heb. adamah, ah-dom-AH) from which we are formed.

Are you tempted to think more highly of yourself or more lowly?

Search the Scriptures

1. Why do you think the second account of our creation outlines the forming of our bodies before the in-breathing of our soul/spirit?
2. In this creation story, what distinguishes humanity from the beginning?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What does it mean for us to be made in God's image and likeness?
2. How do we know what we are responsible for in our community and environment?

Liberating Lesson

Western history has attempted to tell people of African descent that they are not bearers of the image of God. From seventeenth- and eighteenth-century attempts to frame African Americans and whites as different species, to current suggestions that African Americans are dangerous or unintelligent, the powers and principalities that we battle have attempted to deny African Americans the complicated, dignified, and humble humanity that God has bestowed upon all of us indiscriminately. These attempts, however, whether they were as brutal as lynching or as subtle as the mis-education of students, cannot reduce or diminish what God has declared. Integral to the Good News of Jesus Christ is a leveling of humanity: All have sinned, and all are in need of a Savior. Similarly, within the body of Christ, our cultural distinctions are held together in union with Christ and with each other in Christ.

Application for Activation

In your daily life, whether it is work, school, or some other endeavor, make an effort to treat everyone you meet with the dignity that they deserve. As you make personal or even political decisions, remember that you do so not only for your own good but for the good of the diverse body of Christ. Consider how you can pray that God's glory would be exhibited through the many human vessels around you, including yourself. Interrogate your own assumptions about groups of people: If you think that some groups of people are less intelligent than others, less susceptible to the Gospel than others, or inferior in any other way, you are implicitly denying them the dignity of the image of God. Instead, look to the second greatest commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Genesis 1:26–31, 2:4–7

26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

Day 6 was God's creation of humanity, which is the setting for verse 26. There has been much scholarly debate regarding the plural language God used here (e.g., "let us," "our image," "our likeness"). Some scholars believe the language refers to God consulting with other divine beings (e.g., the angels), meaning those who are not God were called to participate in the act of creation. Other scholars suggest the plural language refers to the majesty, attributes, and powers within the Godhead (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit); God was addressing His Spirit, who was present and active at the beginning of creation (Genesis 1:2).

The Hebrew word for "image" is *tselem* (TSEH-lem), which appears only seventeen times in the Bible. Ten times it refers to various types of physical images or idols, which leads to better understanding of why Paul exhorts us to not worship humanity or creation made in the image of God (Numbers 33:52, 2 Chronicles 23:17, Ezekiel 7:20, Amos 5:26, Romans 1:23). Two passages in

Psalms (39:6, 73:20) refer to shadows using the word tselem, and the other five occurrences are in Genesis (1:26, 27, 5:3; 9:6). The limited use of this word in Scripture has made its interpretation difficult.

The Hebrew word for “likeness” is demut (deh-MOOT). As used here, the term means “resemblance, fashion, or being similar to.” Because we realize that God does not have a physical form, it is implied that the resemblance is one of mental and/or spiritual attributes that humanity shares with the Creator. Conceivably, then, the “likeness” or “image” of God toward humanity serves as a mirror to the rest of the world of God’s divine nature.

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. 28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

Immediately after God blessed the first two humans, He gave them power and authority. A study of the phrase “have dominion” (Heb. radah, rah-DAH, “to rule or prevail against”) reveals that God gave humanity authority and stewardship over everything He created. Similar to the command to be fruitful and multiply that God gave the animals in verse 22, God’s command to humanity draws upon His relationship with us as sovereign Creator. Thus, people are created in God’s image to rule over God’s creation on Earth on God’s behalf. The purpose and function of humans involves the responsibility of caring for and cultivating creation. They are also told to be fruitful, multiply, and replenish (Heb. mala’, mah-LAH, “to fill”) the earth and subdue it, speaking to God’s desire for humanity to use godly wisdom to produce and reproduce so that God’s image, likeness, and knowledge cover the earth and rule over it through humanity. God has also called humanity to “cultivate” the earth by creating distinct cultures, languages and art forms as an expression of the bearing of his image as Creator. Theologians have called these verses the “Creation Mandate” or “The Harmony Way.”

29 And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. 30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so. 31 And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

One of the first communications between human beings and God was for them to see the many provisions God had for them. In other words, God was saying, “See all the provisions I have made for you.” Look and know how far God has gone to prepare for your survival and sustenance.

What were they to see? They were to see what God had given them for their well-being. The word “given” is translated from the Hebrew word nathan (nah-THAN). God was thoughtful in providing for the care of creatures. This, indeed, speaks to God’s generosity. Another reference to God’s provision is the use the word ’oklah (Heb. ok-LAW), which KJV translates as “meat,” but

means simply “food” or “something to eat.” Just as verse 29 deals with God’s good provision for human beings, verse 30 deals with God’s provision for the animals; both groups are given food to eat.

Verse 31 is the conclusion of God’s creative activity. God beheld all of creation including His special creation of humanity and called it “very good.” This was additional emphasis from the creation of the other five days. With the addition of humanity to its order, Creation was complete and the natural order of the universe was exceedingly good in the eyes of God.

2:4 These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens,

The verse says the same thing twice in reverse order: “the heavens and...the earth were created” and “made the earth and the heavens.” This style is an ancient form of memory aid for the oral culture that recited these verses (see Genesis 5:1, 10:1, 25:12). The term “generation” (Heb. toledah, toe-leh-DAH), which can be translated literally as “what comes after,” or “what emerges from,” describes something that is generated from something else. Thus, it does not describe the origin of the universe but what immediately follows or arises from the heavens and earth. Therefore, in Genesis 2:4–7, we have a more detailed description of what God did on the sixth day of creation to supplement the account in Genesis 1:24–31.

The combined name “the LORD God” (Heb. yehovah elohiyim, yeh-ho-VAH eh-low-HEEM) establishes the unity of these two terms for God, the personal name (Yahweh) and the title (Elohim). Names were regarded not merely as labels but as symbols or keys to the nature or essence of the being or the thing (cf. Genesis 2:19). Yehovah is another way of writing YHWH (Yahweh), meaning “to be or I AM,” revealing God as self-existent; and Elohim revealing God’s majesty.

5 And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. 6 But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.

The verse distinguishes between perennial wood plants that continue from year to year (“plant,” Heb. siach, SEE-akh) and the green plants that spring up anew each year (“herb,” Heb. ‘eseb, EH-seb). The herbs spring up as the result of rains or of seeds sown by people. The word “field” (Heb. sadeh, sah-DEH), or garden, designates the open field of arable land or a definite portion of ground. Thus the planting of the garden is alluded to here. The phrase “there was not a man to till the ground” plays with the fact that the words “man” (Heb. adam, ah-DOM) and “ground” (Heb. adamah, ah-dah-MAH) are similar in the Hebrew. The term “mist” (Heb. ‘ed, ADE), or vapor, communicates a sense of enveloping. Moisture came up to water or envelop the earth.

7 And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

People consist of multiple elements: a physical, material side (“formed man of the dust”), showing that they have something in common with the physical environment, and an inner personality (“breathed into his nostrils the breath of life”), showing that they have something in common with God. These two elements form one being. The human body consists entirely of basic substances similar to those found in the earth. Here, God gives the man the “breath” (Heb. neshamah, neh-shah-MAH) of life in a special way that indicates that he exists on a much higher level than all other forms of life (cf. Genesis 1:26– 27). He is related to the physical world by virtue of his formation from the substance of the earth. At the same time, he is related to the nonphysical world because he has special breath from God and because he was created in the image and likeness of God.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Psalm 8

TUESDAY

Genesis 1:1-8

WEDNESDAY

Genesis 1:9-13

THURSDAY

Genesis 1:14-19

FRIDAY

Genesis 1:20-25

SATURDAY

Genesis 1:26-31

SUNDAY

Genesis 2:1-9