

# THE GOSPEL PROJECT™ FOR STUDENTS



**GOD'S  
STORY**  
THE OLD TESTAMENT

WINTER 2012-13: LEADER GUIDE  
Ed Stetzer General Editor  
Trevin Wax Managing Editor

LifeWay | Students

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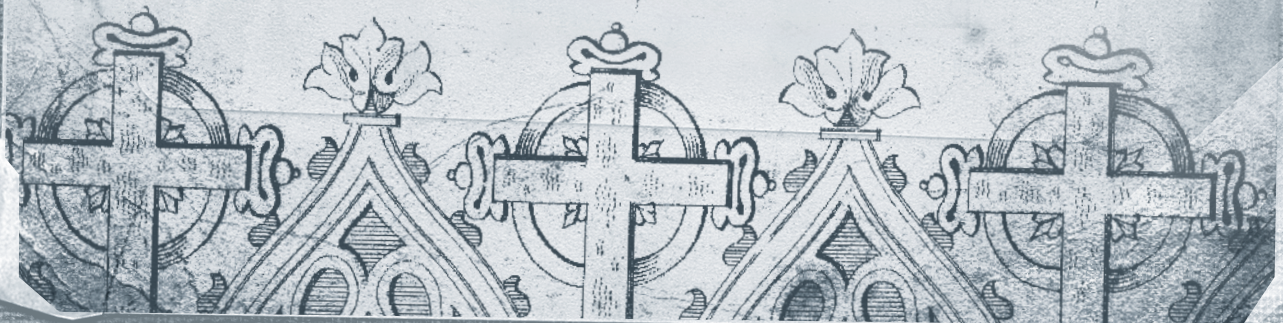
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# A WORD FROM THE EDITORS

THEOLOGY IS “THE STUDY OF GOD.” But unlike academic disciplines where the acquiring of knowledge is viewed as a good thing in and of itself, studying truth about God has a specific purpose: that we might know the God who has shown us grace in the person of Jesus Christ and that we might make Him known. Theology, in the Christian sense, is knowledge about God that leads us into deeper knowledge of God. The gospel is what makes possible this knowledge, and a life of mission is to be the outcome.

*The Gospel Project* is a curriculum now three years in the making. Churches have expressed their desire for a theologically driven curriculum that is biblical and accessible. The development of this new curriculum has taken place with the input from an advisory council (see names on the previous page) and insights offered from churches willing to test the material. I am excited to see a new curriculum that will assist small communities within the church to include a solid theological and missional focus in their discipleship process.

Theology, gospel, and mission. Our goal has been to incorporate each of these important elements in *The Gospel Project*. As we learn more about the grand narrative that the Scriptures tell, we see Christ’s death and resurrection as the focal point of the story line. The good news of Jesus then empowers us—God’s people—to live on mission, representing Christ to those around us and proclaiming His name to the world.

—Ed Stetzer

## **ED STETZER, General Editor**

Dr. Ed Stetzer is President of LifeWay Research and author of numerous books including *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches that Reach Them*. Ed is a contributing editor for *Christianity Today*, a columnist for *Outreach Magazine*, a visiting professor at two prominent seminaries, and is frequently cited or interviewed in news outlets such as *USA Today* and CNN. He and his family reside outside of Nashville, TN.



CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY is a clamor of competing voices. From the TV to the Internet to the social media that floods our cellular devices, we are awash in information. But in the midst of all the noise, God still speaks. He has revealed Himself in the world around us, in His written Word, and most fully in the Living Word—the person of Jesus Christ.

In this quarter we look in detail at the truth that the God who made us has chosen to reveal Himself to us. Along the way, we’ll learn about how we have rebelled and continue to resist God’s revelation. Then we’ll see how Jesus—God’s Word in flesh and blood—has come to obey God perfectly and to suffer the consequences of our disobedience. As God’s redeemed people, we are now enabled to take a posture of humble submission to the authoritative, inspired, and perfect Word of God, even as we open this Word to the world. Our prayer is that the words in these lessons will draw you deeper into the inspired Word of God that continues to speak to us today. May you hear the voice of Christ and faithfully follow the King!

—Trevin Wax

## **TREVIN WAX, Managing Editor**

Trevin Wax is managing editor of *The Gospel Project*. A former missionary and pastor, Wax is a contributor to *Christianity Today* and other publications. His most recent books are *Counterfeit Gospels* (Moody, 2011) and *Holy Subversion* (Crossway, 2010). He blogs daily at Kingdom People.



# THE GOSPEL PROJECT FOR STUDENTS

## THE GOSPEL PROJECT FOR STUDENTS

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We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review LifeWay's doctrinal guideline, please visit [www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline](http://www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline).

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# HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

## 1. GET STARTED

Review the Teaching Plan to get an overview of the lesson. As you study the lesson during the week, make notes on these two pages as you can use these pages to teach from during your group time. All of the questions for the whole lesson are listed here with several key points of content to highlight.



**SESSION 1**

**TEACHING PLAN**

**THE GOD WHO SPEAKS**

**INTRODUCE THE LESSON**

Present a summary of the story of Helen Keller (leader p. 8). Emphasize the value of and need for communication (leader p. 9).

1. Why do you think God designed humans with an innate need to communicate? What does this design communicate about the nature and desire of God?

**TRANSITION**

Introduce the concept that God speaks. Highlight general and special revelation and announce the goal of this lesson (leader p. 9-11).

**THE GOD WHO SPEAKS...**

**1. HAS AUTHORITY.**

Read Genesis 1:3; the "First Commensary" (leader p. 10) if needed. Emphasize the truth that the words of God have authority because it is God who has spoken them. Ask the question below (leader p. 10).

2. In what ways does the impact of a word of encouragement or criticism change depending upon the source?

**HIGHLIGHT**

Call attention to the paragraph about God against idols (leader p. 11). Emphasize the uniqueness of God seen through His revelation to us. Ask the following question (leader p. 11).

3. How does our belief that God has spoken affect our view of Scripture? The world we live in? Our day-to-day behavior?

**2. IS MERCIFUL.**

Before reading Genesis 3:2-6, encourage your group to notice who takes the initiative in this narrative. Use "Further Commensary" (leader p. 12) if needed. Characterize God's speaking in an act of mercy that points us to the gifts of grace. Ask the following question (leader p. 12).

**More Scriptures about the power and significance of the spoken word:**  
Proverbs 8:1-7  
Matthew 12:36-37  
James 3:1-2

**FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION**

What one example of communication within a culture has dramatically influenced your life? What other cultural ability to remember those words enter about the power of words?

**FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION**

If you were to hold to a Deist view of God's revelation, how would that affect your life? How would it affect your view of the Bible?

**HIGHLIGHT**

Emphasize the parallel between physical blindness/face and spiritual blindness/deafness. Help members understand that God's revelation through Jesus makes possible our salvation (leader p. 13).

**3. GIVES US TASKS.**

Before reading Genesis 1:27-30, ask your group to watch carefully for the order of events, particularly what God does and says in this passage. Use "Further Commensary" (leader p. 14) as needed. Emphasize the progression that leads from authority to blessing to mission. Ask the question below (leader p. 14).

4. Why do you think it is important that we understand this progression? What might happen when we seek to understand the race apart from God's blessing?

**HIGHLIGHT**

Share the quote by Tim Keller in the sidebar (leader p. 15) as a springboard to further discussion on the nature of grace and works.

**CONCLUDE THE LESSON**

Conclude this lesson by tying it back to the opening illustration about Helen Keller. Challenge members to ponder privately the three application questions below (leader p. 15).

- 1. Has God spoken to you through His Word in the past few months?
- 2. What Scripture passages has God used to speak to you?
- 3. What blessings have you received from God in the past few months?
- 4. What tasks has God presented to you as a result of these blessings?

Consider closing with the Psalm pages of response (leader p. 15).

**FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION**

Do you think most church members truly believe that God speaks? Why or why not? How would you like to be different if we did believe in communicating with God?

**FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION**

How do we receive the word of the messenger? Why do you think we are so limited to what we are permitted to hear without obedience, which then is a way to hear the blessing?

**VOICES FROM THE CHURCH**

What is the most important thing you have learned from the book of Revelation? How do you think the people in Revelation were able to hear the voice of God through the work of Jesus Christ? How do you think they were able to hear the voice of God?

—Tim Keller

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## 2. BE PREPARED.

Use the Expanded Lesson Content to prepare yourself for the group time. This section has a great beginning point to help you get the discussion started. These pages support the Teaching Plan.

**SESSION 1**

**EXPANDED LESSON CONTENT**

**THE GOD WHO SPEAKS**

**THE GOD WHO SPEAKS HAS AUTHORITY, IS MERCIFUL, AND GIVES US TASKS.**

**God speaks.** From the beginning of time and in the pages of Scripture, God reveals Himself as a God who speaks. His speech is a demonstration of His power, grace, and authority. Because His speech is a demonstration of His power, grace, and authority, it is something more important in life than hearing from God and obeying His voice.

**OPENING ILLUSTRATION**

**HELEN KELLER** was only 19 months old when a childhood illness left her deaf and blind, a prisoner to a world of incomprehensible sensations and insupportable thoughts. "Here you ever been at sea in a dense fog, when it seemed as if a weight like darkness had you all," she would later write. "Light! Give me light!" was the wordless cry of my soul.

Years later Helen Keller's parents hired a teacher, Anne Sullivan, who sought to break into the four-walled world of silent darkness. Sullivan's breakthrough came when she taught Helen how to sign the word "water." Helen described the moment the first realized that her teacher was communicating with her:

*Some one was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word water, first slowly, then rapidly. I found well, my whole attention fixed upon the motion of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten—a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that "w-a-t-e-r" meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could be broken away.*

In upcoming weeks, we will examine the ways God reveals Himself. Think again how limited the methods of God's revelation may seem: categorical **general revelation** and **special revelation**. General revelation refers to that which comes to all people everywhere through creation, for example, where special revelation refers to that which is available to specific people at specific times and in specific places through God's covenant with Israel in the sacred Scriptures. We will look at these categories in more detail in future weeks. For now, we will ponder the truth that God makes Himself known.

In order to learn, we will look at three truths that flow from the reality of God's Speech. The goal of our lesson is to appreciate the goodness of God as seen in His revelation to us and then to spread the news that He has spoken by aligning our lives with His will and selling others of His grace.

1. Why do you think God designed humans with an innate need to communicate? What does this design communicate about the nature and desire of God?

2. In upcoming weeks, we will examine the ways God reveals Himself. Think again how limited the methods of God's revelation may seem: categorical **general revelation** and **special revelation**. General revelation refers to that which comes to all people everywhere through creation, for example, where special revelation refers to that which is available to specific people at specific times and in specific places through God's covenant with Israel in the sacred Scriptures. We will look at these categories in more detail in future weeks. For now, we will ponder the truth that God makes Himself known.

In order to learn, we will look at three truths that flow from the reality of God's Speech. The goal of our lesson is to appreciate the goodness of God as seen in His revelation to us and then to spread the news that He has spoken by aligning our lives with His will and selling others of His grace.

**VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY**

"God has made us to be communicative, and given the possibility of passionate, fervent communication with each other, who do not communicate to us on the basis of revelation and propositions?"

—Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984)

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## 3. FURTHER STUDY.

Additional Resources are provided to allow you multiple ways of preparing. Use as many of these resources as you have time to. Just remember, you can only lead your students as far as you have gone yourself.

**SESSION 1**

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

**THE GOD WHO SPEAKS**

**DEVOTIONAL MATERIAL**

Encourage your group to read the three devotional readings included in the learner guide.

**STUDY MATERIAL**

"The Holy Spirit"—Chapter 3 from *The Faith* by Charles Colson and Harold Fickes  
 "The God Who Made Everything"—Chapter 1 from *The God Who Is There* by D.A. Carson  
 "God Makes Himself Known"—Chapter 2 from *According to Plan* by Genevieve Giddens  
 "Mount: Early Life and Call"—Article by Philip Swanson on *Biblical Illustrations Plus* (CD-ROM) under [www.bibleillustrations.com](http://www.bibleillustrations.com)

**SERMON PODCASTS**

John Lemaire: "The Word of God in Creation" (Parts 1-2)—Guest Speaker on *Let Me Preach* Think Tank (Keri Zankovics)  
 Matt Carter: "In the Beginning Was Jesus"—The Austin Stone Community Church

Find links to these at [gospelproject.com/digitalresources](http://gospelproject.com/digitalresources)

**TIP OF THE WEEK**

**ARRIVE EARLY**

It's always a good idea to arrive early—use just to prepare the room before the first member or group arrives, but to pray. Picture a leader standing in an empty room, arranged for people who have yet to arrive, asking God to provide direction for leading the group experience. The leader envisions the faces of the men or women who will be engaged in Bible study and prayer about the needs they will carry into that room. The teacher also asks for clarity and the ability to communicate in a way that honors God. People can carry an improved when we present a thoughtful lesson. But those same people can be transformed when we teach through the power of prayer.

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Visit **GospelProject.com** for more resources (podcasts, devotionals, and other articles) related to this material.

## SESSION 1

# CREATION: THE STORY BEGINS

**T**HE CREATION OF OUR WORLD reveals the power and authority of God. Human beings are created in the image of God, and human relationships shine light on the nature of God. Because the Creator is sovereign, transcendent, and has chosen to personally reveal Himself to us, we are called to reflect His glory in our work and in our relationships.

### STEPS TO PREPARE

1. Read the background material for this week's lesson:
  - ▷ Genesis 1-2
  - ▷ Pay special attention to the main passages for this week: Genesis 1:1-5, 1:26-2:3, 2:18-25
2. Study the Expanded Lesson Content beginning on page 8.
  - ▷ Determine what elements of this lesson are most applicable to your particular group.
  - ▷ Consider ways to personalize the lesson content for you and your class.
3. Review the Teaching Plan (pgs 6-7).
  - ▷ Refine and adjust the lesson plan based on your group's particular needs.
4. Pray for the Lord's guidance as you lead your group through this material.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### IN CREATION, GOD REVEALS...

1. *His Authority (Genesis 1:1-5).*
2. *His Desires (Genesis 1:26-2:3).*
3. *His Nature (Genesis 2:18-25).*

# SESSION 1

## TEACHING PLAN

# CREATION: THE STORY BEGINS

### INTRODUCE THE LESSON

Use the illustration about TV crime shows to make the point about how evidence leads to conclusions (p. 8). In creation, we can see the evidence of God's existence and the clues of His character. Summarize the goal of this week's lesson (p. 8).

### IN CREATION, GOD REVEALS...

#### 1. HIS AUTHORITY (GENESIS 1:1-5).

Invite the group to read Genesis 1:1-5 with you, asking them to consider all that these verses tell us about God's power and authority.

- ❓ *What does the emergence of light tell you about God? What kind of clues about Him are woven into that first act of creation, the manner in which He made light?*

Make the point that the name "Elohim" used in this passage reflects God's transcendent power (p. 9).

- ❓ *In your own words, describe God's transcendence. Why is the transcendence of God important to understand?*

Then, invite the group to read Genesis 2:4-8, looking for differences between the two accounts, particularly in how God is presented.

- ❓ *Why would Moses want to tell two versions of the same creation story by referring to God in two distinct ways? What do you think he is trying to tell us about God?*


Highlight the personal name for God (Yahweh) used in the second passage, and how this change of name shows God's desire for personal relationship with us. "Because He is Elohim, we have to give Him our all. Because He is Yahweh, we should want to give Him our all" (p. 10).

- ❓ *Is there anywhere else that we see the transcendence of God and His nearness displayed so clearly at the same time? Can you think of a time in your life when His power and authority met with His gentleness and closeness?*



Point to Jesus as the Almighty God who took on flesh (p. 10). Transition by explaining that God wants us to know who He is, and who we are too.

## 2. HIS DESIRES (GENESIS 1:26-2:3).

As you read Genesis 1:26-2:3, ask the group to look for the different way God goes about making humans in comparison to how He made everything else (p. 11).

-  *When it comes to the creation of man, what does God say? What is different about how God decides to create man?*


Reread Genesis 1:28-2:3, asking the group to look for clues as to what the “image of God” is. Discuss how the image of God refers to how we relate (v. 27), rule (v. 28), work (v. 29-30), and rest (v. 31-2:3) (p. 12).

-  *In what ways do you “image” God best? In other words, what area of your life (relational, ruling, work, rest) do you feel most confident that you reflect God?*
-  *In what area do you feel you’re the weakest, and why do you think that’s your weak area of bearing the image of God? What are some practical ways you can improve?*

Highlight that none of us can “image” God perfectly, which is why Jesus came as the perfect image of the invisible God (p. 13).

## 3. HIS NATURE (GENESIS 2:18-25).

Recap the lesson so far, emphasizing the “goodness” of creation. As you read Gen. 2:18-25, ask the group to look for what God suddenly declares “not good.”

-  *Why is it important to have a biblical understanding of manhood and womanhood? How do the differences between manhood and womanhood reveal God’s nature?*

Highlight the complementarity of male/female relationships as a reflection of God’s Triune nature (p. 14). If time permits, use the further commentary (p. 14) to show marriage as a picture of the gospel.

## CONCLUDE THE LESSON

Conclude the lesson by summarizing the lesson and the awesome privilege of being made in the image of an awesome God (p. 15).

- ★ *How does studying creation help you better understand God?*
- ★ *How does understanding truths about creation direct your life?*

## ? FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

*How does it impact you to think of the God that made the heavens and the earth choosing to make you in His image? What does that tell you about the way He feels about you specifically?*

## ? FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

*In what ways does the truth about the image of God affect the way we treat others?*

## ? FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

*How does the recognition that work is assigned by God change our perspective on our jobs?*

# SESSION 1

## EXPANDED LESSON CONTENT

### CREATION: THE STORY BEGINS

IN CREATION, GOD REVEALS HIS AUTHORITY, HIS DESIRES, AND HIS NATURE.

#### OPENING ILLUSTRATION AND INTRODUCTION



HAVE YOU NOTICED the common thread in TV crime shows? Usually, the suspense builds as the investigation comes to a standstill. But then the investigators figure out something game-changing by taking another pass through the crime scene or revisiting an old, dusty file from the archives. Part of the appeal of these programs is that the answer is there the whole time. That one earth-shattering piece of evidence is screaming out to everyone around, trying to be noticed, yet everyone seems to be blind and deaf to it.

What if you lived in an environment in which someone intentionally left behind clues to tell you valuable information about who he is and what he is like—and he actually wanted to be found? What if there was someone who wanted you to know him, so much so that he made an environment with the purpose of teaching you about him in order to lead to a relationship with him? And what if the depths of your heart rejoiced in new and unimaginable ways every time that you learned something new about this amazing person because of the magnitude of who he was?

This is exactly what we see happen in the opening chapters of Genesis. God makes Himself known to us through the evidence of His being and the clues of His character that are sown into nature.

In this lesson, we will see that the creation of our world reveals the power and authority of God. Human beings are created in the image of God, and human relationships shine light on the nature of God. Because the Creator is sovereign, transcendent, and has chosen to personally reveal Himself to us, we are called to reflect His glory in our work and in our relationships. To understand better what creation can tell us about God, we begin by looking at the the way that creation came into existence in Genesis 1:1-5.

# IN CREATION, GOD REVEALS...

## 1. HIS AUTHORITY (GENESIS 1:1-5).

<sup>1</sup> *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

<sup>2</sup> *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.* <sup>3</sup> *Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.* <sup>4</sup> *God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness.* <sup>5</sup> *God called the light “day,” and He called the darkness “night.” Evening came and then morning: the first day.*

There was *nothing*.

Imagine that for a moment. Deadness. Emptiness. Lifelessness. *Nothingness*. That was the state of the universe before God intervened.

The only mentionable presence other than God we see in the beginning was darkness. Then, for the first time in created history, we see God speak. Using only His voice, God calls forth light out of nothing; and light appears.



*What does the emergence of light tell you about God? What kind of clues about Him are woven into that first act of creation, the manner in which He made light?*

God’s overarching power and authority are what commanded creation into existence. This idea of God being above the world in both power and glory is known as His transcendence. That is, He transcends, or goes beyond the limitations and structures of this created world.

The very name that is used to describe Him in the account of creation demonstrates His transcendence. This name is Elohim, the common name of God in Hebrew that means mighty, powerful, and exceedingly great. It is the name that describes the kind of God that speaks and the universe is born—the name to describe a God who owns everything in creation because He spoke it into being. He is high, seated on the throne of the heavens that He spoke into existence. All created beings, including mankind, owe their allegiance to this amazing God because there is none like Him, there is no other God that has such power and authority, such bigness and transcendence.



*In your own words, describe God’s transcendence. Why is the transcendence of God important to understand?*

We also see the author of Genesis take a moment to retell the story of creation again in chapter 2, this time with a subtle yet critical difference. In the second account we see Moses refer to God as “LORD God.” This name is different from the first. This name is the personal name of God; it doesn’t describe an attribute or role of God, but instead calls Him by His personal name: Yahweh.

When Moses uses the personal name of God he communicates something about Him. While we see God as powerful and authoritative in Genesis chapter 1, we see that in the same process of creating God is personal and intimate in chapter 2. While separate and holy, He is also able to be known.



*Why would Moses want to tell two versions of the same creation story by referring to God in two distinct ways? What do you think he is trying to tell us about God?*

God didn't just speak man into existence. Instead, God put His hands into the dirt and formed, shaped, and knitted man together with his fingers. And if that wasn't intimate enough, the Almighty lowered His head to the ground, and met us face to face and breathed life into us. Can you imagine Adam's lungs inflating for the first time with the very breath of God giving him life? Do you see how intimate and close this Yahweh is as described in chapter 2? Clearly, God made man uniquely and intimately compared to the rest of His creation.

It is true that as Elohim, God owns everything. All allegiance and worship is due Him because He is powerful and holy. He has rights over us and we are accountable to Him. But there is this amazing truth that we miss so often because our view of Him stops there. Yes, because He is Elohim, we have to give him our all. But because He is Yahweh, the God that is near and compassionate with His people, we should *want* to give Him our all. We should want to surrender all of our rights because this kind of God wants better things for us than we could ever dream up for ourselves! Since our God is Elohim, we must give him all our worship. But because He's Yahweh, we gladly offer it, as nothing else could make us happier.



*Is there anywhere else that we see the transcendence of God and His nearness displayed so clearly at the same time? Can you think of a time in your life when His power and authority met with His gentleness and closeness?*

## VOICES FROM THE CHURCH

**"If God came into the world, what would he be like? For the ancient Greeks, he might have been a philosopher-king. The ancient Romans might have looked for a just and noble statesman. But how does the God of the Hebrews come into the world? As a carpenter..."**  
 – Phillip Jensen and Tony Payne, *Eden and Beyond: Genesis 1-11*

The clearest place you see the greatness and closeness of God is in the Person of Jesus Christ. Even in the story of Creation, we see God the Son play an active role. According to John 1, all things were made through the power and authority of Jesus Christ—the Word of God. And the same Word would later put on flesh and come to dwell with sinful Man, and would pay the highest price to see us reconciled to the Father. The Word that was present from the beginning, and who will return at the end, is Jesus. This is the One through whom all of creation was made, and the One for whom all of creation exists.

We've seen that one of the major purposes of Genesis 1 and 2 is to teach us something about God's authority. He wants to tell us who He is and how He acts. But He doesn't stop there. He not only wants us to better understand Him, He also wants us to better understand our own nature. Namely, that we are made in His image and for His glory. In the creation account, there is a special place given to the creation of human beings seen in Genesis 1:26-2:3.

## 2. HIS DESIRES (GENESIS 1:26-2:3).

<sup>26</sup> *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, all the earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.”*

<sup>27</sup> *So God created man in His own image; He created him in the image of God; He created them male and female.* <sup>28</sup> *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.”* <sup>29</sup> *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 food will be for you,* <sup>30</sup> *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. <sup>31</sup>

*God saw all that He had made, and it was very good. Evening came and then morning: the sixth day. <sup>2</sup> So the heavens and the earth and everything in them were completed. <sup>2</sup> By the seventh day God completed His work that He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work that He had done. <sup>3</sup> God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, for on it He rested from His work of creation.*

In the language of Genesis 1 we see creation coming into being simply because, “God said...” God said this and God said that and it was so.



*When it comes to the creation of man what does God say?  
What is different about how God decides to create man?*

It’s almost as if God pauses, almost as if he stops to contemplate and deliberate before He creates Man. It’s noticeably different, isn’t it? He doesn’t say, “Let there be Man!” Rather, He converses within the Trinity and decides to do something with Man that has not been done with the rest of creation. There will be something uniquely glorious about Man, making him the pinnacle of all God’s handiwork.

We are the only creation of God that is made in His image. That is what God shows us about our nature; it is defined by the fact that we bear His image. He created us with the desire to glorify His name through image bearing. Our whole being points to His glorious name.

God gifts parents in a special way to further understand this concept of image bearing. See, there are a lot of things that are mine, but none are like my children. Unlike my house, my car and my big screen LCD TV, I myself am bound up into their very physical and spiritual make-up. And because of that they have access to parts of my heart that no one else and nothing else will have access to.

What practically does being made in the image of God include? Look again at the text. From this passage we see that the “image of God” refers to how we relate (v.27), rule (v.28), work (v.29-30), and rest (v.31-2:3).

## FURTHER COMMENTARY

*When it comes to our responsibility to work, we have the opportunity to take the raw materials God has created from nothing and work with them for the universal flourishing and enjoyment of man and creation. That is the model for all work, and we see it all around us. This is exactly what a musician does: he takes the raw material of sound and rearranges it to make the best and most pleasing music. This is also what an author does: he takes the raw material of words and rearranges them for the purpose of telling the best and most pleasing story. When we work and create using the things God has provided to meet our needs, we continue to display Him to the world.*

### RELATE

We see something passed onto Man through God's decision to make them male and female, to keep Adam from being alone. In creating different persons within "Man," God is recreating within humanity the same sort of structure that has existed in the Trinity for all of eternity. There is a community between the three Persons of the single God. The complementary nature that was designed for man and woman to display in creation is also seen within the fellowship of the Godhead. In this we see God inviting us to reflect his personal and relational nature by making us in His image.

### RULE

When God determines that He is going to make Man in His own image, the first thing He attaches to that new kind of creation is the capacity and responsibility to rule. All throughout the creation narrative we have observed God demonstrate His power and dominion over all that He has made. Now we see God entrust some of that power and rule to mankind. He is allowing Man to share in who He is by passing that authority on through His image.

### WORK

This one can be surprising. There are many people that think that work was a result of the Fall of Man. But here in Genesis 1 and 2 we see God give the command to Adam and Eve to work. Essentially he makes them gardeners. He is commanding that Adam and Eve properly steward and tend to what God has created in order to make it flourish.

### REST

Lastly we see God pass the concept of rest down to Man by sharing His image with him. This is a beautiful and blessed thing. God didn't rest because He was exhausted and needed a break; we know that from other places in Scripture. He's God. He did not rest because He was tired or worn out. But He knows that after working we will be.

In the command for us to rest He's showing us again what it means to bear His image. He's showing us that even though we are unlike any other creature in that we are most "like" God, but make no mistake, we are not God. There is an unbridgeable difference between us and God. One of the most critical ways that we can image Him to the world is by showing that we are not God.

See, He knows something about us. We have a tendency to try and take His place and act like Him. We have a bent to want to take Him off His throne, even in the most unintentional of ways. And so He wove into the fabric of creation the rhythm of work and rest that must be obeyed if we are to flourish. He has even designed that we sleep a third of our lives away to show us that we're not God. A third of our lives we lay unconscious, accomplishing nothing but a symphony of snoring, all the while testifying that we're not God. That's our nature. Our purpose is to reflect God's glory—to show God to the world without making ourselves out to be God.

- ❓ *In what ways do you “image” God best? In other words what area of your life (relational, ruling, work, rest) do you feel most confident that you reflect God?*
- ❓ *In what area do you feel you’re the weakest and why do you think that’s your weak area of bearing the image of God? What are some practical ways you can improve?*

While we have been given the honor and privilege above all other created beings to share the image of God and bear it to the rest of the world, we fall terribly short most of the time, don’t we? It can get discouraging when we are confronted with our shortcomings if we are supposed to be the best at this, right? If only we evangelized better. If only we didn’t mess up so much. How is there any hope if we, out of all of creation, are to image God and let the rest of the world see fully who He is?

Colossians 1:15 tells us that Jesus is the image of the invisible God. He is the perfect image bearer. In every way that we fall short, Jesus displays God perfectly and fully. There is no deficiency in His image. There is no distortion or mar. He is the perfect representation of Man displaying God in creation. He does what we were meant to do but never could because of sin, and because of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, God looks at us as if we represented Him on earth just like Jesus did. We get the reward of perfectly reflecting God in the world while Jesus took the penalty we were owed for trampling upon it. Jesus fulfilled all that was lacking in our ability to image God to the world.

Jesus was the ultimate fulfillment of the Father’s desire to have His name glorified. As we accept and participate in the gospel of Christ, we too are able to fulfill the desires of God as His glory is magnified.

Throughout this story, we have seen God make everything in creation; after each new thing, He steps back and affirms that it is good. Sometimes, as with the emergence of mankind, He declares that it is very good. But out of everything that was good, there was something that He declared not good, which we see in Genesis 2:18-25.

## VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

**Work is permeated with purpose; it is intended to serve God, benefit humankind, and make nature subservient to the moral program of creation... Therefore we apply our whole being — heart and mind, as well as hand — to the daily job. As God’s fellow workers, we reflect God’s creative activity on Monday no less than on Sunday. — Carl Henry, Aspects of Christian Social Ethics**

### 3. HIS NATURE (GENESIS 2:18-25).

*<sup>18</sup> Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper as his complement.” <sup>19</sup> So the Lord God formed out of the ground each wild animal and each bird of the sky, and brought each to the man to see what he would call it. And whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. <sup>20</sup> The man gave names to all the livestock, to the birds of the sky, and to every wild animal; but for the man no helper was found who was like him. <sup>21</sup> So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to come over the man, and he slept. God took one of his ribs and closed the flesh at that place. <sup>22</sup> Then the Lord God made the rib He had taken from the man into a woman and brought her to the man. <sup>23</sup> And the man said: This one, at last, is bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh; this one will be called woman, for she was taken from man. <sup>24</sup> This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh. <sup>25</sup> Both the man and his wife were naked, yet felt no shame.*

What happened? There was something missing from the creation of Man when it was just Adam. His aloneness and isolation was not right; it wasn't *good*. In fact, it didn't rightly represent God. Do you remember the personal part of His nature that was passed through the sharing of His image? There was a relational component to His nature that was shared in the making of Man as male *and* female.

The distinct roles between the different sexes have long led to debate and frustration, but what we know for certain is that there is something important to God in the fact that He created them male and female; otherwise He would have stopped after creating Adam. (And that would've been bad on multiple levels!)

The topic of men's and women's roles matters not because there is an argument to be won but because it has something to teach us about God. Both men and women are needed to rightly reflect God because just as the completeness of the Godhead exists within the community of the trinity, the completeness of Man could not be expressed in Adam alone. Eve is needed to complete the image of community within mankind.



*Why is it important to have a biblical understanding of manhood and womanhood? How do the differences between manhood and womanhood reveal God's nature?*

Men and women are both needed in order to give the complete picture of God's nature. To bear the image of God accurately, the relational component of man and woman joining together must be present. That is, God's nature is more fully revealed when Eve is formed out of Adam's rib than when Adam roamed the earth alone.

#### VOICES FROM THE CHURCH

**Besides the immensity of the creation, we dare never lose sight of God's celestial Joy in doing it.**  
— Marva Dawn

## CONCLUSION

God designed creation to reveal His authority, His desires, and His nature. There are clues everywhere about Him because He wants to make Himself known. From the twinkling stars, to the vast oceans, breath-taking mountains, and image-bearing Man—He is telling His story and displaying Himself for all to see.

Truly there is no God like ours. He speaks and the heavens obey. Day and night all of creation sings of His glory and majesty. May we, as His image bearers, the most equipped to represent God in this world, join with the rest of creation in bringing glory to the Father who allows us to know Him. May we look forward to the day when we will know Him fully as He is, face to face, in the light of His glory that illuminates all of heaven.

- ★ *How does studying creation help you better understand God?*
- ★ *How does understanding truths about creation direct your life?*

## VOICES FROM THE CHURCH

**To fill the whole world with his image-bearers who know him, trust him, depend on him, and enjoy him was and is the mission of God in creation. — Keith Whitfield, *Theology and Practice of Mission* (ed. Bruce Ashford), 30.**

## PRAYER OF RESPONSE

*“Lord Jesus Christ, Fill me with your Spirit, that I may be full of His presence. I am blind—send Him to make me see; dark—let Him say, ‘Let there be light!’ May His comforts cheer me in my sorrows, His strength sustain me in my trials, His blessings revive me in my weariness, His presence render me a fruitful tree of holiness, His might establish me in peace and joy, His incitements make me ceaseless in prayer, His animation kindle in me undying devotion.”*

—Puritan prayer

# SESSION 1

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### CREATION: THE STORY BEGINS

#### REFERENCES

Phillip Jensen and Tony Payne, *Beginnings: Eden and Beyond* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), quoted in *What Were We Put in the World to Do?* by Tim Keller (Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2006), 13.

Carl F. H. Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1980), quoted in *What Were We Put in the World to Do?* by Tim Keller, 16.

Marva Dawn, *Talking the Walk* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 119.

Keith Whitfield, "The Triune God: The God of Mission," in *Theology and Practice of Mission*, ed. Bruce Riley Ashford (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 30.

#### DEVOTIONAL MATERIAL

*Encourage your group to read the three devotional readings included in the personal study guide.*

#### STUDY MATERIAL

- "In the Beginning Was Jesus"—Session 1 from *Creation Unraveled* by Matt Carter and Halim Suh
- "The Image of God: Biblical Teaching"—Chapter 3 from *Created in God's Image* by Anthony A. Hoekema
- "The Pattern of the Kingdom"—Chapter 1 from *God's Big Picture* by Vaughan Roberts
- "Light of the World"—Article by Jim Carattini; find a link to this article at [gospelproject.com/additionalresources](http://gospelproject.com/additionalresources)
- "In God's Image"—Article by Harold R. Mosley on *Biblical Illustrator Plus* (CD-ROM); order at [www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator](http://www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator)

#### PODCASTS

Halim Suh: "Displaying Jesus Through Silence"—The Austin Stone Community Church

W. A. Criswell: "In the Image of God"—First Baptist Church, Dallas

Find links to these at [gospelproject.com/additionalresources](http://gospelproject.com/additionalresources)

## TIP OF THE WEEK

#### TRADING A PARTY FOR A PROJECT

Too many times when we think of a class project, we think of going to a soup kitchen and forget about the needs that might be right under our noses. There may be a family in your youth group needing some type of help this month. Encourage students to seek out any needs within their group that may exist this Christmas or if there is a need in their neighborhood. As needs are discovered, mobilize the class to meet the need. You may even want to suggest that in lieu of a Christmas party, your class be involved in meeting a need in your community.