



A Seamless Life

Introduction

The frequently quoted Tim Keller once said, "we often believe that the purpose of the Gospel is to clean up our religious life, but in fact the purpose of the Gospel is to make our whole lives religious." This study is about the pursuit of a Seamless Life in Christ. This is the kind of life that is consistent and coherent. A life that seeks a straight line between belief and behavior - of orthodoxy and "orthopraxy." It asks the question, "How does the Scriptures, particularly the Gospel of grace, shape every arena of our life; our belief, our behaviors and ultimately our affections?"

We will look at the early chapters of the book of Genesis to explore four fundamental and critical concepts. These fundamental arenas of thought form the parameter of a Seamless Life.

God Creation Man Vocation

As we explore these four fundamental arenas, we will approach them in light of four life shaping motives.

Worship
we will live for that which we love

Belonging
we were created for community

Story
we all long to be a part of something bigger than ourselves

Identity
who we are shapes what we do

Why study Genesis 1-2?

The reason that we study the first chapters of Genesis is twofold. First, the first two chapters allow us to peek inside the world before sin. It gives us a glimpse of how life was - how life is supposed to be. It shows us how life can be. Secondly, we study Genesis 1-2 because in it are the formative truths that God taught his people as He was forming their new identity, as a new people with a new purpose. I'm no chef, but I know you can't have cake without milk and flour. They are the main ingredients. The truths of Genesis 1 and 2 are the main ingredients of our identity and purpose.

While this study will feel more like a discussion rather than a study, our first concern is that we handle the Scriptures faithfully. We will ask ourselves, what was the original author saying to his original audience in their original context. This study is meant to help you understand timeless, biblical truths. We will endeavor to be clear and forthright with the essential biblical truths this study attempts to convey.

Also, while we strive to be Biblically faithful and forthright, this is not just a Bible study or a monologue, but a community forming discussion or a dialogue. Many of the questions in this study will ask you to share your thoughts and experiences with the others in the group. This study is meant to develop deeper and more transparent friendships.

Lastly, we began by saying vocation is for God's glory. That's why we've concluded each of these studies with an opportunity to worship God and pray together. Each installment of this study will conclude with a guided time of worship and prayer.

To Be Prepared

In order to be the most effective in this study, each person should read the study and think about the discussion questions before the group gathers. The questions are meant to stimulate thought, but also help develop deeper community. It will be a challenge to answer these questions thoroughly and thoughtfully if the first time you read them is when you are already at the group meeting. Read beforehand! You will be glad that you did.

Since this is a discussion-oriented study and not a "teaching"-oriented study, it assumes that you are familiar with the text. Therefore, read and study Genesis chapters 1-3 before you begin.

Ideas for familiarizing yourself with Genesis 1-3:

- Read all three chapters in one sitting at least three times.
- Listen to the reading of these chapters on Bible audio.
- Make a list of repeated words.
- Make an outline of each chapter.
- Read commentaries on Genesis.

Four Pillars of a Transformative Small Group

Content-we've attempted to create content that is faithful to the Scriptures and applies the Bible to real life in a way where the Gospel of grace empowers us to follow and serve Christ. Please let us know how we can improve!

Coach- leadership effects the "culture" of the group. We challenge leaders to prepare in advance by reading the lesson, studying the text and being ready to be transparent in sharing their life.

Context- no one learns in a vacuum. God is doing a work in your life and in his kind providence, it is not an accident that this study and your current life situation coincide. Attempt to apply what you learn in your current situation.

Community- this study hopes to not only stimulate you intellectually and develop you spiritually, but to help cultivate closer relationships. Approach this study not as a weekly task to complete, but an on ramp to enter into each others lives.

Who is God?

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- The Sabbath Day
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- Our Weekly Gospel Drama

Discussion One
LONGING FOR HOME

When we think of the first book of the Bible, most of us don't immediately think about it as a book of hope. But consider for a moment how Moses was inspired by God to communicate this to the nation of Israel who had been enslaved in Egypt for some 400 years. To put this in perspective, that is about two times longer than the United States has been a country. When we think about Genesis, the book of origins, in light of Israel's personal history, we begin to see how revolutionary the truths of Genesis were to both its original audience and us as well. Our sense of origin has a powerful way of "naming" us. Origin is identity-forming. While God was redeeming Israel from their slavery and making them a new people for Himself, He was keenly concerned that they embrace the truth of their origin. He was forming a people to whom He was giving a new identity. By teaching them their origin and identity, God gave them meaning in their present situation and hope for their future.

For Deeper Community: Share with the group your “origin.” Starting with your earliest memories, tell the group about your life in way that they can understand your “story.”

Lovers Longing for Home

Look at Deuteronomy 6:1-4.

“Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son’s son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. Hear, therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

Why did God give them statutes and rules?

What was the summary of all the statutes and rules?

We are lovers created to direct our love toward an object. By nature and design, we aim our love toward some object and it is ultimately that object that we worship. This reality, we will argue, is the primary formative aspect of life. You will do what you love and live for whom you love.

For Deeper Community: Share with the group the biggest inhibitor in your life to living out your true identity and purpose. (Be as specific and vulnerable as you're comfortable.)

For Worship and Prayer: Psalm 8 is a perfect passage to begin our time of worship and prayer. Notice how it exalts God, but also affirms man's identity. Read this passage aloud, and spend time worshipping God by praying aloud as a group.

Psalm 8

8 O Lord, our Lord,
 how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
2 Out of the mouth of babies and infants,
you have established strength because of your foes,
 to still the enemy and the avenger.
3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
 the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
4 what is man that you are mindful of him,
 and the son of man that you care for him?
5 Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings[b]
 and crowned him with glory and honor.
6 You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
 you have put all things under his feet,
7 all sheep and oxen,
 and also the beasts of the field,
8 the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,
 whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
9 O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Discussion Two

God the Storyteller

Imagine you are walking along the tidal basin in Washington, D.C. when you sit down on a park bench to enjoy a cup of hot chocolate and a view of the Jefferson Memorial. You overhear a nicely dressed man with an Italian leather briefcase tell a person on the phone, "I'll be there soon, bring the money." For most of us who've watched too many spy thrillers, we immediately think it has to be espionage. In actuality, it's a husband who has tickets to a concert in the city after work and who is reminding his wife to bring some cash for parking. His gym clothes are in the bag because he wants to exercise before he meets his wife for dinner.

The point is that once we know the plot of the story, we interpret the details differently. When you realized he was going to exercise, your idea of the contents in the leather bag changed significantly! God, through Moses, is painting a new picture of Israel's story. Though they were slaves, He will teach them they are His image-bearers and co-rulers. Though their life was one of chaos, the real world is a world of wonder and grand design. Though their life had been meaningless, their new life would be one of flourishing and cultivation.

The biggest part of the story was the part that Israel could hardly recognize and only a few would seem to embrace. Embedded in the story of how life used to be was a story of how life will be. It was a story of the One who would defeat the evil one and make all things new!

The author and social commentator, Wendell Berry, made the comment once: "The significance of one's life is determined by the story in which they believe to be a part." Similarly, Alasdair MacIntyre says, "I can only ask 'What I'm I to do?' if I first ask 'What story or stories, do I find myself a part?'" Our default setting is to place ourselves in the framework of a story. If you ask somebody to share about themselves in a way that we can really understand them, they may begin by describing facts about themselves, but eventually, will have to tell a story for you to know them and understand their meaning. What is important is that stories convey meaning. For example, those men and women some years ago who decided to fly airplanes into buildings on September 11th believed they were a part of a greater narrative. The narrative they believed gave meaning to their choices and activities. Our goal is to understand God's story of redemption and explore how you and I are implicated in that story - called to wrap our lives around that axis.

Israel's Story

Our source document in understanding what it means to live a Seamless Life is the book of Genesis and so to best understand what God was teaching this burgeoning nation is to understand what He had inspired Moses to communicate to them in their particular situation. If we recall, Moses was leading Israel through the desert to the promised land when Genesis was originally given to the people. But we must keep in mind where they had come from. We see that Israel is not only being delivered from the vocation of slavery, they are being saved from their identity of slavery. It is no small coincidence that historically we have linked vocation with identity.

Read Exodus 6:1-13

What does this passage tell us about who God is?

What does this passage tell us about who Israel was?

What does this passage tell us about the relationship with God to his people?

In the Beginning

In the first two chapters of Genesis, God is speaking to a redeemed people to whom He is giving a new identity. In these first verses, God paints a portrait of their new identity. Much of this study will be examining the particular aspects of that identity. Knowing our true identity is the starting point for living a Seamless Life.

For Deeper Community: Create an "Identity List." List the things that make you... you. For example: "I am a husband, father, son, brother, pastor, American, middle child, guitar player and outdoorsman." Share with the group your list.

For various reasons, we tend to put more weight on some items on our list than others. Sometimes, we even put them above our relationship with God. What thing or things on your list tend to be too important to you?

Hidden

When my daughter was in the 6th grade, she tried out for the cheerleading squad. Because it was a competitive tryout in which many of her friends were also hoping to

make the squad, it was a trying and a complicated time. I was so proud of how hard she worked at her tumbling and at nailing her back handspring, but sensing how identity forming the process was becoming, my wife and I would try to encourage her with a passage from the book of Colossians. It speaks of our life being hidden in Christ. We would remind her that her life was hidden in Christ and not in cheer. If she made the team, we would celebrate, but being a cheerleader would not define her or puff her up in pride. Her life was hidden in Christ and not in cheer. If she didn't make the team, we would be sad and even cry, but her life wouldn't be over or undone because her life is hidden in Christ and not in cheer.

For Worship and Prayer: Meditate on each portion, pausing to pray and interact with God on each thought.

For you have died,
and your life is hidden
with Christ in God.

When Christ who is your life
appears,
then you also
will appear with him in glory. -Colossians 3:3

Discussion Three
Elohim-God Alone

If you and I were to stand up in the middle of lecture at most state universities and say, “In the beginning God created...” what would be the reaction? While the general populace tends to believe in a god, the intellectuals of the world have all abandoned any notion that transcends the world of time, matter and energy. In Israel’s day, unlike ours, whether or not creation was a product of a creator would not be disputed. What would be disputed is which god created the heavens and earth. The starting point of identity creation is thinking rightly about God. Moses in Genesis wants to make sure that Israel believed in the right God and he wants them to think rightly about Him.

For Deeper Community: Share your own journey about knowing God. How did you come to know Him?

Elohim

As the sacred text begins, we hear the name Elohim. What we see throughout the Bible is that the names God chooses to reveal Himself with are packed with meaning. Much has been written about this name of God. It is made up of the common name for “god” in the plural form. The plural form is explained often as a means of supporting the argument for the Trinity. While I don’t think it is a coincidence, I think the purpose of the plural form may be a bit different. The plural form was to show power, might and superiority. I think this best fits Moses’ argument for the superiority of Elohim over and above the pagan gods of the day. It also assured the desert-wandering Israelites of Elohim’s supreme power; the power that He had recently demonstrated to Pharaoh through powerful signs and wonders.

For Deeper Community: Share an episode in your life where God showed Himself as capable to provide, protect or lead you or share an episode where God showed Himself as superior to other “gods” in your life?

Competing Stories of Origin

Understanding the competing stories of origin is helpful for us to understand the stark contrast in what Moses is communicating to Israel and the origin stories of the culture in which they were immersed. Many origin myths of the near Middle East were similar in

that they often consisted of two competing powerful beings. These gods would inevitably battle where one superior or craftier god would defeat the other by beheading, dismembering or disemboweling them. The bloody carnage of the defeated god was (somehow?) transformed into the new human race. This newly conquered race would ultimately be made slaves of the triumphant god.

Because ancient people like Israel were a slave race who were taught a false origin story, their wellbeing was based on their ability to appease pagan gods through service or sacrifice. With the words “Elohim created...” Moses is making a radical departure of the pagan worldview. He is arguing that Elohim is not like these gods. Israel’s constant pull toward idol worship is apparent in the initial warning from God at Mt. Sinai.

And God spoke all these words, saying, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. “You shall have no other gods before me. “You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God···
-Exodus 20:1–6 (ESV)

What was God's act of redemption for Israel?

What was His expectation for those He had saved?

Israel’s Idolatry

If you read the Old Testament, you will eventually read some story of Israel’s interactions with the Canaanite gods, Baal and Asherah. Asherah was believed to be the goddess of the moon and her counterpart Baal was believed to be the god of the soil and fertility. The worship of these gods often involved sex among the gathered worshipers and was believed that this invoked the gods to sexual intercourse themselves that would bring fertility for the worshipers in return. Besides the perverting power of idolatry and misbelief, what pagan worship also reveals is that idolatry is always a means to an end. For the citizen of the near Middle East, life was hard. There was no retirement plans or welfare programs. The natural world posed their most constant and severe threat and their hope rested in the fertility of the land, the frequency of rain, the size of their flocks and the size of their families. The worship of idols was a means to some aspect of their own wellbeing. We can categorize wellbeing into four simple categories.

Idols of Wellbeing

- Safety– your sense of control or comfort.
- Status– your feelings of esteem based on others opinion of you or fitting into the group.
- Significance- your feelings of esteem based how you feel about yourself.
- Satisfaction– your natural desire to fulfill physical and emotional appetites.

What is important is that these four pursuits are not altogether wrong in and of themselves. In fact, I would argue that they are given by God and are part of being human. They only become sinful when we look for something in creation to provide them rather than the Creator.

For Deeper Community: Which of these idols do you most struggle with: safety, status, significance or satisfaction?

For Worship and Prayer: [Read Psalm 63](#)

Praise God for how He satisfies and ask Him to give you a greater desire for Himself.

Discussion Four
Yahweh is Lord

One of my favorite after-school cartoons was Super Friends and the Hall of Justice. Along with the more popular heroes of Superman and Wonder woman, there was an obscure character named Apache Chief. His superpower was unique in that if he said a certain mysterious word in his native-American dialect, he would grow. And by saying it repeatedly he would become a giant the size of planets! The point of this trip back to the 80's was to illustrate that often our view of God is simply a multiplied view of ourselves. We tend to believe that God is simply a really large and infinitely more powerful one of us. While this is true, God's name of "To Be" tells us that He isn't simply an extra large One of us, He is Someone utterly different. He is without human category - inscrutable and beyond our finding out unless He reveals Himself to us.

God's Character

In John Frame's helpful work Salvation Belongs to the Lord he explains that the character, nature and actions of God are brought together in the name Yahweh. God is LORD. Frame recognizes three aspects of God's Lordship:

- Authority- God's right as Creator to govern.
- Control - God's absolute ruling over all of his Creation.
- Covenant- God's binding himself to His creation in love.

In Frame's view, the best way to understand God's Lordship is to understand that He alone has all authority to rule over all things and rightly deserves all honor and glory. Secondly, He has absolute power and thus He does rule over all. Lastly, because God is love, He has bound himself to his creation, namely his people. This means that God is sovereign over all things and brings about all things for the good of His people and for His glory.

[Read Acts 17: 22-29](#)

In what ways does this passage point to God's authority?

In what ways does this passage point to God's absolute control or power?

In what ways does this passage point to God's covenant presence and love?

God's Community

Dr. Cornelius Plantinga once said, "at the center of the universe, self-giving love is the dynamic currency of Trinitarian life of God. The persons within God exalt each other, commune with each other, defer to one another." For many it is surprising that at the beginning and center of the known universe is community. The God of the Bible is a Triune God. He exists in community. As you explore this passage in John, notice these key ideas about the Triune community of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

- Though equal in glory, the Trinity shows authority and submission to One another.
- There's deference and glory-giving. Each Person enjoys giving the Other honor.
- There's intimacy and delight among the Persons of the Trinity. They find joy and pleasure in each Other.
- There is agreement and harmony of will. Each Person joins perfectly in unity of wills, yet in diversity of purpose and activity.

[Read John 17:1-19](#)

In what ways do you see deference, intimacy, joy and unity in the Trinity?

What's the significance in life that our God is a God of relationship and community?

God's Cause

Just as the fact that God exists in community may surprise you, the fact that God is doing something may take some by surprise as well. Often God is portrayed as a heavenly figure that passes the time in the clouds with not much to do all day. Nothing could be further from the truth of the Bible. We find in the Bible that God is actively carrying out His purposes in the world.

Read [Colossians 1:15- 29](#) and compare with [Ephesians 1:3-10](#). Notice God's purposes for the world.

What do you see that God is doing in the world?

How does the reality that God is actively carrying out His purposes implicate us in our lives?

For Deeper Community: In this study, you've thought about God's character, community and cause. Which of these ideas has the biggest bearing in your life today in light of your current situation and the circumstance of your season of life?

For Worship and Prayer: A great way to pray is to read a portion of Scripture and then respond to God in prayer about what you just read.

Read [Psalm 77](#) aloud stopping as you're led to respond to that portion of the text with prayer.

Discussion Five

Missio Dei

America is a nation in love with sports. According to Forbes, “The sports market in North America was worth \$60.5 billion in 2014. It is expected to reach \$73.5 billion by 2019.” To put this in perspective, this is over three times the country of Nicaragua's entire gross national product!

Let's be completely honest. I love sports too - I always have. My dad was an athlete and so playing sports was always a part of our lives. As an adult who still wakes up from dreams of playing high school football or baseball at least once a week, I've tried to press into what (and why) our deep connection is with sports.

Deep in our lives is embedded two animating values. Both are ignited and cultivated as a spectator or participant in sport. The first is our desire for transcendence, to be a part of something bigger than ourselves. That's why when a group of 18-22 year-olds lift a trophy over their heads in celebration, we all yell “We won!” Though I never stepped foot on the field, I am caught up in the transcendent nature of it all. We all long for purpose and to belong to something bigger and weightier than our personal lives.

The second animating value that is at work in our hearts is a tendency toward story. In 1980, one of the major tv networks experimented with a broadcast of an NFL game without play by play announcers. While ratings spiked because of curiosity, it was largely seen as a complete failure and the concept was dropped. It was said, "This became a game with no context played by men with no pasts."

A sporting event draws us in because it is a story unfolding in real time with suspense, drama, antagonists, protagonists and ultimately, with consummation when the winner crosses the finish line or hits the final buzzer-beater. That's why a game that ends in a tie is so unfulfilling. It feels incomplete...it's unconsummated.

We are people who long for transcendence. We long to be part of a purposeful story that is bigger than we are. We long for consummation; for things to be settled and made right. We all know life isn't the way it ought to be and we look for all things to be made new.

For Deeper Community: Share a time when you were on a team, organization or a part of some movement that caused you to feel a sense of transcendence - that you were a part of something bigger than yourself.

Ordering and Reordering

The creation story is a narrative that reveals our ultimate transcendence and story because it shows us what God is doing in this world. It shows us our ultimate purpose and calls us up into a deeper and broader narrative. Paul David Tripp once said that our problem is that we tend to “shrink the size of lives down to the size of our lives.” The creation narrative is the opening chapter of the grander story of what God is doing.

Notice in the first lines of Genesis where we find the creation story. We quickly recognize the refrain: “It was good.” At the culmination of each creation day, God makes the declaration naming that aspect of His handiwork as “good.” Then, at the culmination of His sixth day, He makes the sealing and final exclamation: “It is very good.” Then He entered rest. God has taken His creation that was unformed and uninhabited and meticulously orders it to bless His creation. It is very good. It's just the way He wants it. Like the artist who consummates his life's work with his signature in the corner of his masterpiece, God signs His handiwork with a proclamation of its completeness.

What you notice is that creation is ordered and full. Each of the habitations (heavens, water, land) are ordered and filled (luminaries, birds, fish and beasts), teeming with life. Marked by fruitfulness and in a world without sin, there is complete flourishing.

As you follow the storyline, you know that this completeness would not last long. The sin of man would mar the world and bring death and decay. And yet...

For Deeper Community: List all of the theological words that you can think of that begin with the letter R. Why do you think many of them begin with the prefix “RE?”

While the effects of man's sin are devastating, you see a grander and broader narrative begin to unfold. Often when the Scriptures paint a picture of how life will be, it harkens back to language and images of the pre-fall state.

Look at these texts more closely

[Read Isaiah 65:17-25](#)

While there is clearly poetic language here and the text should be understood accordingly, what are the word pictures that are created?

From Old Testament to New Testament, the Scriptures tell of a unified story of redemption. They tell of God reordering in Christ what was unordered in the Fall. While it isn't clear how much will be reordered prior to Christ's return (there is much debate over that), what is clear is that all will be made new.

[Read 2 Peter 3:8-13](#)

Compare this passage with this one about the New Heavens and Earth. How is this passage different from the passage in Isaiah?

[Read Revelation 21:1-8](#)

How does this passage bring together the ideas in both Isaiah and 2 Peter?

[Read Romans 8:18-23](#)

According to this final passage in Romans, what and who is waiting for adoption and redemption?

The Aim & Scope of the Gospel

Through the analysis of these passages, we see that the Missio Dei - God's Mission in this world - is to reorder that which was unordered at the Fall. In Christ, God is carrying out His plan of redemption for His people and ultimately His Creation. The aim of the Gospel of Christ then is the souls of God's people while the scope of the Gospel is all of Creation. The goal of the Gospel is threefold:

- To restore estranged sinners to relationship with God.
- To restore broken images of God to be renewed images of Christ.
- To restore all of creation.

For Deeper Community: If God is writing a story of redemption in Christ where He is restoring a people to Himself and restoring all of His Creation for His glory, how does this affect the purposes of our lives?

For Worship & Prayer: Pull out your phone and go to your map app. Find your location and begin to slowly zoom out until you can see the map of the entire world. As you do, think about the landscape of the world around you and recognize the brokenness in the world.

- Pray for the salvation of specific people.
- Pray for the physical needs of specific people.
- Pray for justice for specific parts of the world.

Discussion Six
A Very Good Creation

Very soon after arriving on campus for my freshman year of college, I began to hear rumors of a professor that you wanted to avoid at all cost. He was known to be a staunch atheist and combative to Christianity. What was worse is that he was boring! Most college students can withstand a few insults and critics of their faith, but no one can take 60 minutes of blank stares and drool. My first day of class rolled around and I dutifully filed in along with a 100 or so wary souls. As soon as everyone sat down, a short, wiry-thin, balding middle-aged man entered. He was the quintessential science professor with pocket protector and all! There was a long, and abnormally pregnant pause when he asked this question: "What is real?"

What I was not aware of is that he was immovably committed to the Socratic method. What this meant was that he would ask a question, and remain silent until someone in the class answered correctly. Most incorrect answers were greeted with "interesting, but not quite." Other than that, he would sit in silence until someone else took a crack at it. Many days were spent in silence awkwardly staring at his nerdy smirk. It was both incredibly boring and infuriating at the same time!

We were on the quarter system so that meant classes met every day. Our first day of class was on a Monday and no one answered correctly until Friday! We endured the first five days of class with the professor literally not saying another word except "interesting...but not quite." The only thing actually interesting that happened all week as I recall was on day four when a student who was utterly exasperated yelled something at the professor and stormed out of the classroom! He smiled and responded with his usual smirk.

On Friday before we broke for the week, those in the class who had now joined forces in order to overcome and together decipher the riddle finally coaxed enough of an answer. Before the bell rang that Friday, he made his point and said: "What is real is only that which can be sensed by the five senses."

For Deeper Community: What was the professor's assumption about creation and ultimately about God that he was communicating to the class? Describe an interaction that you've had with someone who operates out of a very different world and life view than you? Trace the differences that you had to your different assumptions about life.

The Cosmos

This study is about creation. But what is creation exactly? When having a discussion about creation it's best to define what we mean by the term. Most of us have heard or said a similar prayer, "God, thank you for your beautiful creation." We usually mean that we are grateful for the beautiful mountains or lovely beaches. While this is a part of creation, this is not exactly what we mean by the term creation. Creation is "ex nihilo." This means that God created everything out of nothing. Creation encompasses everything that is not the Creator. This is important because when we hear the Apostle Paul in Romans say "all of creation waits eagerly for the adoption of the Sons of God" it means that all which God has brought into being is anticipating future redemption. In addition, when Christ says in Revelation, "Behold I make all things new" it means that He will make all of creation new. He won't simply make the natural world new. He will make everything new. Mountains, gazelles, industry and the arts will all be a part of restoration. While it may be easier to imagine industry and arts made new, we see that all of creation will be restored. Everything will be the way it ought to be.

In our last study on Missio Dei, we discussed the repetitive nature of the creation story of Genesis where creation begins as a place unformed and uninhabited. After each day's creative activity, God declares His handiwork "good" only to culminate His creative work with the final proclamation of "very good." The point here is threefold:

- Creation was shaped by God. It is a product of His endless imagination and is the arena of His glory.
- Creation moved from unordered to ordered in the creation account. It has a design and a purpose.
- Creation though now marred by sin is fundamentally good. Creation is beautiful but broken and in need of redemption.

For Deeper Community: Think of the most awe-inspiring thing in the natural world that you've ever seen. What did you learn about God in it?

Icons of Glory

I met an artist once who told me the difference between idols and icons. He said that idols are when we give something glory and it lands and stops on the thing. With icons, the glory and honor move past the thing to the creator. This isn't an argument for icons in corporate worship, but it does show us that all of creation is iconic. It's the arena of God's glory so that when we see a sunset, read a beautiful poem or peer into a microscope, the glory was never meant to fall on the thing of creation, but was always meant to move past it to the Creator.

Read Job chapters 40- 42:6. Describe different things that demonstrate how God relates to his Creation. Describe Job's response to God.

Against Secularism

Unlike what my science professor believed, creation has both physical and spiritual dimensions. In the ancient and developing world, there was more readiness to accept this fact. But in the growing modern (or post-modern) world, our society works on the basis that time, matter, energy and space are all that exists; therefore, Creation is a closed system. To the natural secularists, the world operates on blind, mechanical functions. Creation is seen as amoral and with no real overarching purpose. Modernism has thus shaped much of western society. Yet, historically, there was another way of thinking that has influenced western society and its influence is still felt. In the ancient world, under the influence of Plato and Greek culture, the physical world wasn't seen as amoral, but bad. The things of the mind were higher and better while the things of the temporal, physical world were lesser. That is why in Greek culture the aristocratic philosopher was the most esteemed and the slave who did menial tasks was the least regarded. In fact, that was the very reason for having slaves, because "hands on" tasks were seen to be beneath the higher, more intellectually-oriented classes.

This is important for two reasons. We still see the effects of this today. In western society, we see more labor oriented jobs where people work more immediately with the physical world as lower with less dignity. Secondly, we in the Church can see salvation as a way of escaping or evacuating this world for heaven. While salvation does involve the gracious rescue by our hero Christ, we will also explore how salvation in the fullest sense is broader and deeper and expands far beyond our personal redemption to the restoration of Creation itself.

Resurrection

It's important to also know that the New Testament was written against the backdrop of the platonist Greek culture. This is why Jesus would argue with the Sadducees about the resurrection. The Sadducees were Hellenized Jews. That meant they were Greek thinking Jews. If you recall, the argument that Jesus had with them was over the bodily resurrection. A bodily resurrection would have been an affront to the platonist because the very goal of their version of salvation was to escape the evil, physical body. Paul had a similar run-in with Greek philosophers who chided him for belief in a bodily resurrection.

The Bible not only teaches that Jesus was raised bodily from the dead, but everyone will experience how a bodily resurrection and ultimate salvation (or eternal condemnation) isn't only a spiritual reality, but a physical one. We anticipate a New Heavens and Earth where this physical planet and physical heavens will be restored and renewed.

We see that in the story of creation, the story of the resurrection and in the anticipation of Creation's restoration, the Scriptures affirm the physical world as Good and the object of God's ultimate renewal of all things in Christ. A proper view of creation reminds us that creation is good, yet in need of redemption. It tells us that creation has order and purpose; it shows us that creation is the arena of God's glory. As one author said, "God does not make junk and doesn't junk what He has made." The goal of the Gospel is to redeem the souls of men and women, while the scope of the Gospel is to restore all of creation in Christ.

For Deeper Community: Our tendency is often to divide life into sacred and secular. How does a biblical view of creation dismiss the sacred-secular divide?

The Firstborn of All Creation

For Worship and Prayer: Read [Colossians 1:15-23](#) and stop to exalt Christ in prayer in every way He is exalted in this passage.

Discussion Seven

The Imago Dei

Some years ago I spent 10 days at an orphanage in Africa. When traveling to the Dark Continent there are numerous diseases, infections and viruses for which you have to be constantly on guard lest you bring one home. The African contagion that I think is most often caught is the disease of Africa itself. If you've been, you know what I mean. There is something about the place and the people that are infectious. I often experience flare-ups of sweet memories of laughing children playing beneath the African sun as it set each evening behind the distant plains of Zambia.

My wife is a professional photographer and so before my trip, I begged her to let me take one of her older cameras. She was understandably hesitant. She was aware of my adventuresome spirit that's prone to leave digital equipment in the back of Jeeps. She also knew that when it came to taking pictures I am a hack at best. So she cut a deal. She allowed me to take one of her cameras on the condition that I had to leave the settings on manual for the entire trip. In her wisdom, she knew that this would force me to learn how to take pictures. Or possibly I would get frustrated and leave the camera in its case where it would remain safe and more likely to return home with me!

Each evening when the activities and the work of the day were done, we'd play with the children in the glow of the slow African sunset. It was heavenly. It was also a great opportunity for a novice picture-taker to learn how to use a camera. The kids would run and play, and I would desperately try to capture the moments and their sweet image.

For Discussion and Deeper Community: Describe a time in your life when you experienced the beauty and dignity of other people. What caused you to appreciate them? How did you see the character of God in and through them?

Imaging God

The ancient world was a world ruled by empires. As you read the Old Testament, you can trace the storyline of Israel against the backdrop of the ruling nations that repeatedly conquered and ruled the Middle Eastern world. When the opening lines of our Bibles were given, it was Egypt and the Pharaohs who ruled the block. Their kingdom was vast and with the benefits of the fertile Nile River delta, they were incredibly wealthy and powerful.

Old Testament Theologian, Richard Pratt, explained in his book *Designed for Dignity* that at the time when Israel was being led out of Egypt, that Pharaoh, in order to demonstrate his dominion, would commission artisans to create replicas or images of himself that would be placed throughout his kingdom. They would be placed in the marketplace, the university, government buildings, theater and courthouse to represent him throughout his domain. This was to signify that wherever his image was found so could be his reign.

When God declared that man was created in His image, this was a sharp departure from the belief of the day. Not only was it Pharaoh's practice to place his image throughout the kingdom, it was held that only royalty were the image-bearers of the gods. Everyone else was below them.

Read [Genesis 1:26-31](#) & [Genesis 2:5-8-5](#)

How was man like God?

What was man tasked to do?

What were man's responsibilities?

How did God provide for man?

God's Image

While the creation story doesn't speak exhaustively on what it means to be God's image, we can see these six essential truths about being God's image bearer.

God created man to be in relationship with Him and with others. We see that He breathed His own Spirit in Him and that He made him - male and female. Man is an embodied spirit meant to have a spiritual relationship with God. Just as there is unity and diversity in the relationships of the Trinity, God made man - male and female - to live in relationship that glorifies God through unity and diversity.

God created man to reign with Him. God would invite man to co-reign with Him as He executes His provision of and for His creation through His image-bearers.

God created man to represent Him. Man, being like God and by reigning with God, was meant to demonstrate, exemplify and thus glorify God in his co-reigning with Him.

God created man with a specific design. Man was engineered with certain physical, mental, emotional and spiritual qualities in order to fulfill his purpose.

God created man with dignity. Man, being created in the likeness of God, has an essential worth bestowed upon him, not because of his ability or function, but because God bestows to him his worth.

God created man to have dominion. This means that he has agency or a volitional will. It means that his choices have real consequences and bring about real outcomes. It also means that under God man is a steward of all that God has allotted and every assignment He has given.

Dignity & Dominion

For Discussion and Deeper Community: In a modern, secularist worldview where does human worth come from? What is the cultural sentiment around the word “dominion?” How would you explain dominion to others?

Conformed to the Image of Christ

For Discussion and Deeper Community: Read [Romans 8: 29](#), [1 Corinthians 15:49](#) and [2 Corinthians 3:18](#). Since you’ve been a follower of Christ, what are the biggest ways you feel that you’ve been transformed? In what areas do you feel the biggest need to grow?

For Worship & Prayer: Read [Revelation 21:1-8](#)

Praise Him for the anticipation that one day we will be fully conformed to the image of Christ in the New Heavens and Earth when He makes all things new.

Discussion Eight
Work as Creating & Cultivating

A while ago, I was talking with a friend who told a story of a precarious situation he found himself in and one that most of us would rather avoid. There was an issue with his septic tank causing it to back up and was only moments from flowing into his house. Fortunately, though it was well after midnight, he was able to find a plumber equipped and available to help. The man promptly arrived and went to work. My friend who had been waiting inside as the gentlemen pumped the contents of the septic tank into a tanker truck, explained that he came outside to check on the progress. Groggy and in his bathrobe, he was startled to find the gentleman whistling, smiling from ear-to-ear and seeming to enjoy pumping what most of us avoid. My friend was perplexed by this unwarranted pleasure and felt compelled to ask him why he was so happy at doing what seemed so horribly disgusting at 1 a.m. My friend said that when he asked him, the gentleman smiled and explained with a country drawl. “Ya see dis stuff is much better in my tanker truck than in your basement, ain't it?” My friend couldn't have agreed more. “Ya see when folks like you call me, it's always because they NEED me.”

While I can't say if this plumber was a follower of Jesus, he still demonstrates a biblical view of work.

- He saw that he had the resources that he could wield to serve others.
- He saw that his small contribution was a part of God's provision for creation.
- He honored others by serving and meeting needs.
- He worked with integrity and trustworthiness.
- He felt the pleasure of his unique vocation and how his skills are being used.

For Discussion and Deeper Community: What job or tasks have you been given that you really enjoyed? What was it about that work that you enjoyed?

God's Work ~ Man's Work

Read [Genesis 1:1-3](#) and [Genesis 2:1-2](#)

The first sentence of our Bible shows us a surprising picture: God creating. In Genesis 2:1, we see another startling image: God rested. Though God neither needs to work nor rest, why do you think He did?

Why do suppose God put man in a garden instead of a temple or palace?

Look closely at the words “work it” and “keep it.” Explain what these two different phrases mean. What can we learn about work from these words?

Sin and Work

Genesis 3:17-And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Why is it significant that God gave man work to do before sin entered the world?

What was the curse placed on Adam? What was the difference between work before the Fall and work after the Fall?

Why work?

God Worked

Though God was free and able to simply speak everything into existence, the Genesis narrative says that He first creates ex nihilo (out of nothing) matter, space, energy and time. Their original state was that of formlessness and disorder. Out of the infinite resources of His own imagination and creativity, He shaped the raw materials of the universe into a purposeful creation. This is the first act of work. Upon completion, God admires and declares His creation as good.

Adam Worked

God created man and endowed him as image-bearer with the godlike qualities of rationality, creativity and energy. He mandates that Adam fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over it. God planted a garden and placed man in it to cultivate it - to apply the qualities of his image-bearing to it and make something that is God-honoring and useful. Work is a means to love God and love others. By placing man in a garden and then entrusting him to cultivate it, we see that God built potential into the world. God commissioned man to not only steward and care for creation, but to cultivate it and continually make something of it for His glory and the good of others.

Serve Others

God's providence is His benevolent provision for His creation. In His grand design and wisdom, He created the world in which He loves and sustains. He has chosen to sustain His creation primarily through the systems of the natural order and through the benevolent activity of His image-bearers. When we work, we apply our God-given abilities to reorder and cultivate creation for the good of others.

Provide for Your Family

The Scriptures state plainly that if one does not provide for their family he or she is worse than an unbeliever. Work is how we produce wealth and the resources that provide both needs and blessings. But it primarily is the means in which we are responsible for caring for those God has entrusted to us.

Worship God

Work is a narrow category of activities that the simple doing of it can honor God. Like worship and prayer, simply doing the activity of work is an opportunity to worship, honor and please the Father.

For Deeper Community: How does the culture at large think about work? In experience, how does the church feel about work? How do you feel about your current work?

Animating Assumptions

There are many assumptions about work and it's important for us to be aware of these animating values behind our vocations. A partner of mine in ministry often meets with people from different fields. He gathers groups of lawyers, doctors and business people to interact with their particular field. He told me once that he had given one group a homework assignment. He asked them to come up with the three unique and unspoken driving assumptions about their work and industry. He explained that these are the values that often govern our work, though no one ever publicly or openly articulates them. These are things that often motivate, shape and animate the work we do. They returned the next week and these were the three things they together came up with:

- Win at all costs.
- Bill as many hours as possible.
- Climb to the position of partner as fast you can.

For Deeper Community: How could you see these values shaping and animating how the people in their office work? What are the animating assumptions and hidden values of your field of work or in the work environment that you are in?

Two Ditches

In conclusion, Oz Guinness speaks of the two ditches of work in his book *The Call*. One ditch is when we have a low view of our work and we don't treat our calling with the dignity that God has given it. We ourselves or the culture around us may belittle or demean work. On the other hand, there is another ditch. We can esteem work too highly by making it the means of our significance, status, safety and satisfaction in this life.

The Bible teaches that work is from God and it is inherently good, yet now in the fallen world work is tarnished and Creation is not as readily productive as it was in the Garden.

Work is an honor and privilege, but work is also hard. It teaches that honest work is esteeming and satisfying and fruitful, but our worth and ultimate joy is in Christ alone. The Gospel transforms our view of work from being about what we can ultimately get to what we can ultimately give. Christ is the source of our identity and joy, while work is good and noble, we cannot ask it to give us more than God intended. Because our lives are hidden in Christ, we are free now to work for the glory of God and enjoy the satisfaction of serving others and a job well done!

The Worker's Heart

...obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eyeservice, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. Colossians 6: 23-24

Notice the things the worker is to be mindful of. He is to be mindful of his supervisor. He is to be mindful of the work itself. He is to be mindful of future reward. Ultimately, he is to be mindful of the Lord in his working.

For Deeper Community: Do you feel applying this passage to your work is difficult? What is the hardest part for you?

For Worship & Prayer: Pray about your work. If you are unemployed or underemployed, pray that would provide work. Ask God to be present with you on the job. Make known to Him situations at work. Thank God for your job.

Discussion Nine
Rhythm of Rest

As we began this study, peering into the world of ancient Israel, we probed the perspective of the redeemed people of God who were being made into a new covenant community with a new identity and purpose. Imagine again that you had been a slave in Egypt your entire life and generations before you. Your known heritage was that of bondage. Your sole task as the property of another was to appease your master through the labor of your mind and hands. Imagine the news when upon your delivery from slavery, you were told: "Take a day off!"

How do you imagine they felt toward Yahweh? If you recall in the Egyptian world-view the Pharaohs were the images of God. They, the Pharaohs, were the divine masters of the created world. And now in this new biblical perspective, it is they- the sons of Abraham, who are created with dignity in the image of God and stewarded with wonderful privilege of gracious dominion, faithful keeping and creative cultivation. It was they who were tasked with fruitfulness and flourishing, not as the property of the elites, but as the curators of culture and society.

Imagine if this honor was bestowed on you. (and it has been!) If you're like me, it would not take long for this to go to your head. In God's divine providence and perfect wisdom, He ordered the grain of Creation to move within a rhythm of work and rest and in doing so He esteems the value of vocation while safeguarding our allegiances and affections to be found in Him alone and not in the meaningful work He has assigned.

In this final study, we will explore the rhythm of rest and work and how the gift of the Sabbath Day esteems the work of our hands on the other days while holding work in its God-given place.

For Deeper Community: Describe your perfect day of rest.

The Sabbath Day

Take a moment to examine these critical passages about the Sabbath Day.

Read [Genesis 2:1-3](#)

If God is all-powerful, all-wise and completely sufficient- not needing to either "work" or "rest"- then why do you suppose He gave us this picture of He himself working and resting?

What does it mean for God to bless the Sabbath Day?

What does it mean for God to make the Sabbath Day holy?

For Deeper Community: How does our society in general view the idea of Sabbath? How does the modern Church treat the Sabbath?

The Fourth Commandment

In the Old Testament, the Ten Commandments are given through Moses to Israel on two separate occasions. While the Law is the same, you see some nuance. Compare the two commands of the Sabbath in Exodus 20: 8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15.

Read both passages and compare and contrast. How are they the same and how are they different?

Read [Exodus 20: 8-11](#)

What does it mean to "remember" the Sabbath?

What is the basis of the Sabbath stated in verse 11?

Read [Deuteronomy 5:12-18](#)

What does it mean to "observe" the Sabbath?

What was the basis of the Sabbath stated in verse 15?

What we find in these passages are two very significant truths that undergird the gracious gift of the Sabbath. First, we see that Sabbath is rooted in the very fabric of Creation. It is from the beginning and a part of God's design. It should be no wonder that almost every culture throughout history has operated on a weekly schedule or pattern of keeping time. The Sabbath Day and the week's rhythm of working and resting are ingrained in creation. Secondly, we see that Sabbath is rooted in redemption. Israel was meant to rest and celebrate in worship their deliverance from slavery. Therefore, our approach to the Sabbath Day is one of humbly ordering ourselves within the warp and woof of God's created order of things. Secondly, our approach to Sabbath is that of worshipful adoration. It is the exalting of God's glory and the celebration of God's grace in our lives. It is to rejoice together as a covenanted and committed community the joy of our salvation in Christ!

Our Weekly Gospel Drama

Take a closer look at [Exodus 16](#) and explore how God was calling Israel to rest in Him.

What was the name of the wilderness?

What was the people's attitude toward God?

In verse 4, God says this is a test. What was the test?

What was God's intention in providing for them as it's stated at the end of verse 12?

What do we learn of God's goodness in verse 17-18?

What we see in this God's desire is to give His people the best gift- Himself. He is calling His people to trust Him to provide and thus in trusting His provision they receive the gift of His glory as they witness His power and love as the One who cares for their needs. God's kindness is always framed by His wisdom in that He provided exactly what they needed- no more... no less. What is mind-blowing, is God's gracious response is in the midst of their self-absorbed grumbling. God understands our willful natures and our tendency towards self-rule that presses back against His gracious rule. Yet, God's kindness leads to repentance (Romans 2:4) and so with compassion He calls his people to trust. Work is important, but it is not ultimate. Your Father knows what you need before you ask (Matthew 6:8). He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:32)

God has built into the fabric of life and the rhythm of our weeks the opportunity to trust Him. We are invited to come to Him- knowing that For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:3) We are in Christ and thus our work, or parenting, our civic duties are not what validates our existence, but it's that we are blessed and accepted in the Beloved. (Ephesians 1:6)

For Deeper Community: What competes with your ability to rest on the Lord's Day?

In conclusion, the Sabbath day is a gift that teaches us several truths. Truths that are not simply to be filed away in the encyclopedia of our minds, but to be embodied and incarnated in the way we carry out our weekly lives.

- The Sabbath Day affirms our limitations and frailty- everybody needs a break physically and emotionally from work. It affirms the dignity of work and yet affirms God as ultimate in our lives.
- The Sabbath Day gives practical expressions of being holy within the culture. We are to be set apart and thus the "set apart day" is to be treated differently than the other days.
- The Sabbath Day assures we live in fellowship and intertwined with the Body of Christ as a worshiping, missional community.
- The Sabbath Day is a gift and an expression of God's goodness towards us. It is to be enjoyed. It was made for man! (Mark 2:27)

For Worship & Prayer: Read [Psalm 92](#) and Respond in Prayer.

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