

MADE IN HIS IMAGE

+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

People were created as God's image-bearers, providing all of humanity with a unique purpose and relationship with the Creator.

+ BACKGROUND PASSAGES:

Genesis 1–2; Psalm 8

+ SETTING:

In the beginning, God made everything good. Everything was exactly the way He intended: the earth and sky, the sun, the moon, and the stars, the creatures that live on land, in the sea, and travel through the air, and even time itself! But His creative work didn't end with any of these. He was saving the best—the pinnacle of creation—for last. In His final creative act “in the beginning,” God created us.

DAY 1

READ:

Genesis 1:1–2:3

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 1:26–28

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #28: IMAGE OF GOD IN HUMANITY

The image of God in humanity is understood as mirroring God's attributes in our nature, actions, and relational capacities. In Jesus, we see the true image of God. He perfectly mirrors God's attributes, fulfills God's will, and enjoys a perfect relationship with the Father. The Bible continues to speak of the image of God in humanity even after our fall into sin, even though our ability to rightly reflect God has been marred.

Children are a reflection of their parents. While each of us is distinct from our mothers and fathers and, if we are parents, our own children are distinct from us, we can easily recognize our shared characteristics—both the good and the bad. Just as this is true in relation to parents and children, it is even more so in relation to God and humanity, God's image-bearers.

Humans were made with this intention in mind—that we would reflect something of God's perfect nature and character into the world around us. Everything in us, everything about us, was made for this. In the beginning, we, and more specifically, the first two humans, could truly reflect His goodness and perfection. They were good because God is good, and He called them good—"very good," in fact (Gen. 1:31).

But as we know from the rest of the Bible's story and from our experience in the world, they didn't stay that way. Because of our sins against God, our nature as image-bearers has been distorted. We still bear God's image because we can't not. It is who and what we are. But the image we reflect is distorted. We are stewards who subjugate, cultivators who exploit, twisting what is good and beautiful and true of our nature, like a reflection in a funhouse mirror.

But we are not without hope. Though we cannot perfectly reflect God's nature and character to the world on our own, there is One who can—Jesus Christ. He is the image of the invisible God, the exact expression of His nature (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3), the One who was in the beginning with God as God and through whom and for whom all things were made, including us (John 1:1-2). He is our hope, the One to whom we belong by faith and the One in whose image we are being remade day by day until the day we see Him face to face.

What is one way you see God's nature reflected in your own character? What is one way you need to grow to reflect God's character more faithfully?

DAY 2

READ:

Genesis 2:4-25

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 2:4-14

NOTES

Every writer makes choices when telling a story, especially a true story. Every detail matters. Every word is intended to drive the story forward. That's true of the Bible as well. We can't forget that the Bible is telling a true story with crucial themes that carry through every page. So why would Moses, God's inspired human author of Genesis, seem to double back and revisit something he already wrote about in the first chapter of Genesis? How does that help move the Bible's story forward?

The answer is found in one of the most important of the Bible's themes: God's dwelling with humanity. This theme carries through the entire Bible, but it begins here with God's making a garden. Yet it is easy to miss. We often read this passage focusing on the details of the location, sometimes with the goal of identifying where it really was in the world (because, remember, this garden was a real place). But reading it this way risks missing the point that Moses had in mind.

Moses was describing a place that can rightfully be called a paradise, but it wasn't paradise merely because of its beauty and splendor. It was paradise because this was the place where God would meet with humanity, His image-bearers. This is God's desire, and we read about it on every page through the rest of Scripture—in God's response to humanity's rejection of Him, through the flooding and renewal of the world, in the promise and fulfillment of bringing a great nation from one man, and ultimately in the rescue of people from every people group and ethnicity through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit to dwell in those who believe. This theme of God's dwelling finds its ultimate fulfillment in another garden—a garden-city, the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21–22), where Jesus returns to make all things new. God will one day dwell with His people forever.

How will the present presence and the future promise of God to dwell with His people affect your life today?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"What brings a person value, significance, and hope is not what he does, but *with whom* he does it. The call to live in continual communion with God means that every person's life, no matter how mundane, is elevated to sacred heights."¹

—Skye Jethani

DAY 3

READ:

Genesis 2:15-25

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 2:18-23

NOTES

With rare exception, we are conditioned to understand the word “helper” as, in some way, subservient. In our understanding of the relationship between the helper and the helpee (yes, I know it’s not a real word), the helper plays a secondary or supporting role to the one he or she is helping. In some communities, even Christian ones, this understanding is taken to a greater extreme. For example, some people implicitly and often explicitly cast a vision of women as of secondary value to men, a vision that finds its home in cultural conditioning and sin’s effect on our hearts and minds more than in the Bible itself. But when we take this misconception into our reading of the Bible, we miss the beauty of God making the woman to be a helper suitable for the man.

The Bible clearly describes the first man and woman as equals. Both were equally made in the image of God, without distinction or hesitation (Gen. 1:27). Genesis 2 expands and deepens this in its description of the woman’s creation, saying that she would correspond to, or complement, the man. We, male and female, are alike, equally distinct from the rest of creation, equally bearing the image of God. But we aren’t the same. Equal and same are not synonyms. The ways in which we bear God’s image are different. When the woman was called a “helper” (2:18), God was not declaring her nature as secondary; He was naming the specific way in which she bears His image, to be a helper as God is a helper and a source of support and comfort as God is to His people (Ex. 18:4; Ps. 10:14; 20:2; 121:1-2; 124:8).

The man’s unabashed delight at seeing the woman for the first time, the one who was “flesh of [his] flesh” (Gen. 2:23), reminds us about the value the Bible places on both of God’s image-bearers. Our equality is a joy. Our differences are cause for celebration. And together we bear God’s image fully.

How can you celebrate the ways others uniquely reflect God today?

DAY 4

READ:

Genesis 2:15-25

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 2:24-25

NOTES

Moses characterized the first humans' relationship in a way that, while sounding strange to our ears, is important: They were naked and felt no shame. These words are a picture of profound intimacy—two people, at their most vulnerable, with no fear, uncertainty, or anxieties casting a dark cloud over their relationship.

This is something no other human being since these first two has ever felt completely in any relationship. Even in our deepest relationships, whether romantic or platonic, we resist intimacy. In our experience, intimacy and vulnerability require the risk of getting hurt or of shame creeping in.

God's intention for human relationships was for just this sort of intimacy, free of the fears that prevent us from allowing people to truly know us. While we struggle with this, the perfect love of God in Christ casts out all fear (1 John 4:18). Christ's love doesn't only cast out our fear of God's wrath and condemnation or our fear of the consequences of our sins (though it certainly does that). His love also casts out our fears that prevent us from experiencing the profound intimacy for which God designed us.

Fundamental to our vulnerability with others is our experience of intimacy with God. Through the gospel, what once was lost is restored. We are known by Him (Gal. 4:9), and nothing is hidden from Him. None of our thoughts, fears, hopes, or dreams are unknown to Him. He cares about them all. Because of Jesus, the sins we commit no longer hinder our intimacy with God. We can know Him deeply right now, living in the light of His promises. Right now, today, we only know Him in part, as though looking in a mirror, but even though we can only know in part now, a day is coming when we will fully know Him, even as we are already fully known right now (1 Cor. 13:12). On that day, our intimacy with God on both sides will be complete.

Would you describe your relationship with God as an intimate one? Why or why not?

DAY 5

READ:

Psalm 8

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 8:3-9

NOTES

If you ever wondered about the value God places on human beings, you only need to read this psalm. Humanity, which was made a little lower than God Himself (Ps. 8:5), rules over the rest of creation. We are God's representatives for the rest of the world. This is true of no other created being in heaven or on earth. Not even the angels are "crowned" with this glory and honor, to be called and function as God's image-bearers. They do not share in this special calling; they do not share in dominion or authority over the rest of creation.

But this uniqueness is not a reason for pride. It is a call to humility. As the psalmist questioned in verse 4, we have to ask ourselves: What have we done to be worthy of this glory and honor? Why should God care about us, His creatures? Why should He place such privilege on humanity? The psalmist, even in asking the question, provides the answer—nothing. Our value to God has nothing to do with what we do or have done. Our value to God is based on how He made us, on who we are.

This is exceptionally good news for those who are weary and heavy laden (Matt. 11:28). It is good news for all who sin and stumble and continually try to earn God's affection and approval. It is even good news for those who doubt that God exists. Our value to God is not something that can be earned. And while our inherent value does not remove the need for the forgiveness of our sins, it allows us to marvel evermore at the lengths God went to save us—sending His Son, Jesus, to become like us in our weakness, to become lower than the angels (Heb. 2:5-9), so that by faith in Him, we can be forgiven forever.

How will you treat others because of humanity's inherent value as God's image-bearers?

GROUP

NOTES

POINT 1: We bear God's image in our roles
(Gen. 1:26-28).

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #28: IMAGE OF GOD IN HUMANITY

The image of God in humanity is understood as mirroring God's attributes in our _____, _____, and relational capacities. In _____, we see the true image of God. He perfectly mirrors God's attributes, fulfills God's will, and enjoys a perfect relationship with the Father.

The Bible continues to speak of the image of God in humanity even after our fall into sin, even though our ability to rightly reflect God has been marred.



What are some specific ways we can faithfully reflect God as His image-bearers in our culture?

POINT 2: We bear God's image through our relationships (Gen. 2:18-23).

Human beings, made in God's image, are _____ beings in a way that is analogous to (but also different from) how God is a relational being. While our triune God is self-sufficient, we _____ external relationships in order to flourish.

God made human beings male and female to exist as _____ and suitable _____ for one another. In the marital relationship, among others, we reflect God's image.



How does a biblical worldview differ from the culture's on the issue of gender?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"That the woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to top him, not out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved."²

-Matthew Henry (1662-1714)

POINT 3: We bear God's image as a crown of glory and honor (Ps. 8:3-9).

Human beings in comparison to the greatness of creation seem _____ and insignificant. Yet it is only humans who were made by God to _____ over all of creation.

NOTES



How have you experienced the greatness of creation making you feel insignificant?

Humans wonder at God's care in part because we are sinners, but God sent His _____ as "a son of man" so that we might be _____ through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection (Heb. 2:6-9). Jesus, the image of God, is worthy of all glory and honor.



What are some ways we can honor and glorify our Lord here on earth?

MY RESPONSE

Because every human is an image-bearer of God, we fulfill our mission of glorifying God by loving and respecting all persons and pointing them to Jesus, the only One in whom they can find life and purpose.

- **HEAD:** How might the truth that God created people different yet equal change your perspective on yourself and others?
- **HEART:** What individual or group of people might you struggle to view as God's image-bearers? How has this study challenged you in this area?
- **HANDS:** What is one action you can take this week to put God's character on display as His image-bearer?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"For you have made us for yourself and restless is our heart until it comes to rest in you."³

-Augustine (354-430)