

Session Two: Created For Good

God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. (Genesis 1:31)



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WHO DID GOD CREATE MEN TO BE?

Session Introduction

In order to understand the story of humanity, which is also our personal story, we need to start at the beginning and examine our origins: how we came to be in the first place, what was the purpose of creating us, what has happened since, and what are God's plans for our future.

Into the mystery and obscurity of human beginnings and purpose, God has revealed to us important things about our origins that we could otherwise not have known, and his purpose for us men is clear.

The first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis, is a "fighting" document. God equips us with the truths necessary to combat lies that constantly arise among us. Consider five key truths that Scripture teaches us from the very beginning:

First: The world around us is a *creation*, and has a Creator, namely God. This may seem obvious, but it has important consequences. Because God created the universe and us, it means that we are not just a random accidental happening. Our lives have a meaning and a purpose rooted in God's intentions for us. Men today often struggle to find direction for our lives. **Knowing that God created us helps us orient our lives to his purpose.**

Second: God created the universe, and humanity, *in and for goodness*. After each stage of creation, we are told that "God saw that it was good." This again may not seem especially important, but it is a crucial truth often rejected by the world. Human life is never easy, and often involves suffering. Because of this, people throughout history have wondered whether the world around us is fundamentally evil. **God says with impressive clarity and force that, no matter how difficult things may get, at the very foundations of the world is goodness.** Surrounded by a society that often tells us that men in particular are bad, God's declaration of goodness is a great source of hope for us.

Third: Because God has a good purpose in mind for his creation, and he created it in time, *the passing of time is part of God's working out of his plans.* He has revealed to us a "creation story," a developing narrative that comes to its fulfillment in and through time. **Time is not our enemy; in fact, growth over the course of a man's life – physically, emotionally, spiritually – is a gift of God, not a curse that needs to be fought against.**

Fourth: While God viewed the different stages of creation as good, only when he created humans did he see his creation as "*very good.*" **The man and woman are the crown of creation, stewards of God's authority who bring creation to its fullness and completion.** There have been both ancient and modern ideas that speak of "toxic humanity," and there is a suggestion that the world would be better off without humanity, but God has revealed something very different.

Fifth: Not only are humans the crown and stewards of God's creation, but we have been created *in his image and likeness.* **As a result, we are gifted with a dignity and a destiny that surpasses anything we could have thought or imagined.**

As men trying to understand our place and purpose in the world, these truths, revealed to us by God, give us a solid starting point for our lives. Trusting in the God who created us, let us see what else he is speaking to us through the Creation story.

I. Opening Prayer

Pray together as a group:

*O Lord Jesus Christ, open the eyes of my heart that I may hear your Word,
and understand and do your will.*

*Do not hide your commandments from me, but open my eyes,
that I may perceive the wonders of your Law.*

Speak to me the hidden and secret things of your wisdom.

*On you I set my hope, O my God,
that you shall enlighten my mind and understanding with the light of your knowledge;
not only to cherish those things which are written, but to do them;
For you are the enlightenment of those who lie in darkness,
and from you comes every good deed and every gift.*

Amen.

II. Reading Scripture

Read aloud as a group the following passages.

After reading each passage, answer the questions together in order to draw out some of the key ideas.

Some main ideas for each passage are listed in the back of this book to help with your discussion if needed.



1. Genesis 1: 1-5
(Beginning of Creation)

- Describe in your own words what is happening in this passage.
- Who is at the center of these first words of the Bible? Why is that significant?
- What does the passage describe God as doing? What is the significance of the light?



2. Genesis 1: 26-31 (Creation of humanity)

- Describe in your own words what is happening in this passage.
- What are some of the key characteristics used to describe humanity as God created us?
- What commands did God give to humanity in this passage?

3. Genesis 2: 1-9 (Second Creation account)

- Describe in your own words what is happening in this passage.
- What is different about this second creation story? What is being emphasized about humanity in this story?
- What is the nature of humanity as described here? What elements go into the creation of humanity?

4. Genesis 2: 15-25 (Adam and Eve)

- Describe in your own words what is happening in this passage.
- What command does God give to Adam?
- What is the relationship between humanity and other creatures? What sets humanity apart?
- What is the relationship between Adam and Eve? How does Adam react to seeing Eve?

III. Applying Scripture

Based on your reading, discuss the following questions as they apply to your life. Depending on how much time you have available, you may not be able to discuss all of these questions. If necessary, choose one question to discuss in a significant way.

- 1 The creation stories of Genesis show God to be a loving father who has created the entire universe for us and has created us to be his beloved sons, but many men today feel fatherless and do not believe that God is a loving father to them, often because of their experience with their own fathers. This leads to all kinds of problems: anxiety, lack of a sense of self, lack of confidence, over-intensity about achievement, to name a few. **Do you see God as a loving Father? Why or why not? Are there areas of your life where you act as if you are on your own without the support of God the Father? How has that affected your actions and attitudes? What are some ways that you can turn to and trust in God as your Father and Creator who has your best interests in mind?**

- 2 Our world often tells us to reject the idea that we are created by God so that we can do whatever we want with our lives. If we're not God's creatures, then we don't have to listen to what he says, and we can make ourselves in our own image and likeness and not God's. **What are the ways that you have, subtly or overtly, declared your independence from God? Are there certain parts of your life about which you do not want to hear what God may have to say?**

3

When Adam first encountered Eve, he rejoiced because he had found an equal partner that he could share his entire self with. In the first creation story, the creation of humanity cannot be separated from the idea of male and female together as the image and likeness of God.

As a man, do you see and treat women according to the truth that women and men have equal dignity and worth? As a husband, do you love your wife like Adam is meant to love Eve – with a total gift of self, without holding parts of yourself back in secrecy or shame? What are some challenges to loving with a total gift of self?

4

We are living in a world that either denies or does not know that God is master of the world. This can cause us to despair about the future of the world, and about our own futures.

Do you trust in the goodness of God and his plans, or do you allow worries and despair to rule in your life? How can you respond to evil and tragedy in the world and in your life with the knowledge that God is good?

IV. Call to Action

Write down for yourself one concrete way that you are going to apply today's Scripture Study to your life.

Example:

Choose one lie about God or yourself that you tend to believe that today's readings and study have shown to be untrue. Write it down on a piece of paper and spend time every day considering how that lie has affected the way you've acted. Make an effort to allow the truth God has revealed to change your view of yourself, those around you, the world, and God.

V. Closing Prayer

Pray together:

*Lord God, let us keep your Scriptures in mind
and meditate on them day and night,
persevering in prayer, always on watch.
We beg you, Lord, to give us real knowledge of what we read,
and to show us not only how to understand it,
but how to put it into practice,
and to obtain spiritual gifts
enlightened by the teaching of the Holy Spirit,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
whose power and glory will endure throughout all ages.
Amen.*

ON READING GENESIS

A supplemental note for further study

A question that often comes up is: "How are we to read the Genesis account of creation?" Is it meant as a literal description? If so, how can that be reconciled with certain obvious difficulties from a scientific point of view? It is necessary to remember in reading the Scriptures that God is a master of the whole of human communication, and he speaks to us in many different modes, each imparting truth to us. Think of the many kinds of writing we find in the Bible. There is historical writing, prayers and hymns, poetry, legal material, parables and moral tales, letters, prophecies, all of which use many different modes of imparting truth: sometimes literal, sometimes figurative, sometimes poetic, sometimes symbolic, sometimes philosophic. To read the Bible intelligently, as the Catholic tradition has done, we will need to have some sense of the mode in which God is speaking to us. The Church reads the love poetry of the Song of Songs differently from Jesus's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. The story of the Prodigal Son and the account of Christ's resurrection are both true, but they are true in different ways. The Prodigal Son is not meant as a literal history; we do not demand to know whether those two sons ever really existed. On the other hand, the reports of the resurrection in the Gospels are meant to be taken as strict literal accounts: at a particular time and place, Jesus really did rise from the dead and walk out of his tomb.

The book of Genesis is telling us about things that really happened, but that happened in a manner impossible to convey in a simply literal way. We have no idea what it would mean, described scientifically, for God to create the universe out of nothing. It surpasses the limits of literally observable facts, and yet God brought it about. We cannot easily grasp God's purposes as they work their way over millions of years, and yet we need to understand them. When we read the early chapters of Genesis, we are hearing God tell us very important truths. But the point is not to give us a literalistic description of these things; it is to affirm the reality of God's creation, of who we are, why we have been created, and what are God's hopes and plans for us. Our task is to hear and perceive these foundational truths that God is revealing to us.

Additional Readings from Scripture

These optional readings build on the themes discussed in this session. You are encouraged to read and pray with them on your own in between this meeting and the next.

Job 38: 1-7 *"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?"* God is speaking to Job in this passage, reminding Job that he is a mere creature in the presence of the one who created everything.

Psalm 8 *"You have made him little less than the angels."* This Psalm speaks of the place God has given mankind as stewards of his creation.

Proverbs 8: 22-31 This beautiful passage speaks of the role of Wisdom in creating the world. It has been seen as a figurative expression, fulfilled in Christ, of the truth that the world was created through God's Word.

John 1: 1-5 *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* This is the classic New Testament treatment of the place of the Eternal Word in creation. "All things were made through him."

Matthew 19: 7-9 *"In the beginning it was not so."* Jesus is dealing with the question of divorce, and he appeals to the original creation as the way to understand God's purposes for marriage.

John 19: 32-4 *"One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water."* Jesus, the new Adam, like Adam was put to sleep, and from his side came his bride, the Church, born through baptism and the eucharist.

Colossians 1: 15-17 *"In him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible."* St. Paul gives a magnificent expression of the cosmic nature of Christ, who *"is before all things, and in him all things hold together."*