

SESSION 2

The Purpose of Humanity



QUESTION 1:

What's your least favorite household responsibility?

THE POINT

God created us to serve and honor Him.

THE PASSAGES

Genesis 1:1-5,26-31

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

One of my responsibilities around the house is to take out the trash.

Let me tell you, I am horrible at it.

When I enter the house at night, I can tell by a single look from my wife whether I've fulfilled my end of that bargain. Sometimes, it's not even a look: it's an outright, straight-to-the-point question: "Did you take out the trash, Robby?"

Taking out the trash is not even a difficult task. The trash bins are right by the back door, but somehow I always manage to forget to do this one simple, obvious thing.

As kids, many of us dreaded responsibility, and we know firsthand that responsibility is handed to us in greater measure as we get older. But responsibility is not a bad thing! God has built responsibility into us. He gave it to us when He put us on the earth. He coded us for it and gave us the tools to carry it out. It's up to us to recognize what our responsibility is—and carry it out.

Genesis 1:1-5

1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

4 And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

5 And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

KEY WORD: **Created** (v. 1)—The Hebrew word (*bara*) describes the activity of making. When used in the Old Testament, God is always the One performing the creative action.

When we want to communicate with an audience, we have to keep three things in mind:

1. What are they familiar with?
2. What do we need to tell them?
3. How do we bridge the gap between those two?

With these things in mind, think about the original audience who would have read Genesis 1. Tradition tells us that Moses probably wrote it, which means the people who first read it were most likely still wandering in the desert after being freed from their slavery in Egypt. These Israelites had never known a place to call home that didn't include either the desert or slavery. What they knew about God had been passed down orally, the way most things were passed down in those days: they taught their children, who taught their children, who taught their children.

The Israelites were surrounded by groups of people in settled and established civilizations: Egyptians, Canaanites, and Hittites. If these groups were perceived as more “civilized,” the Israelites

would be tempted to think the stories of their gods were more established too. Maybe the Egyptians were right: the world was birthed out of a cosmic egg. Or perhaps they should consider the Mesopotamian belief, that all we know was created out of the carcass of one of the deceased gods.

Genesis 1 reveals a wholly different account, one that quickly cuts to the chase. “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” It’s almost as if the writer were saying, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, “Listen, I know you’re hearing all kinds of confusing things from all kinds of people. Let me tell you about who is really in charge, what He did, and how you can know Him.”

The biblical worldview is unique in that not only do we know who created everything, but we can also have a personal relationship with Him. God *invites* us to have a relationship with Him. Through Jesus, we have access to the Father, the Creator of the Universe. Jesus is in a special position to do that for us because, not only is He one with the Father, He was actually present at creation.

- ▶ The Word (Jesus) was with God in the beginning (John 1:1-2).
- ▶ Not a single thing that has been created was created apart from Jesus (Col. 1:16-17).

If you look up at the night sky, you will see a carpet of stars, most of which would make our sun look tiny. If you look down below your feet with a microscope, you will see an entire ecosystem of bacteria that work together to make sure plants can grow. God did all that simply by His word. And the Creator of *all of that* has invited us into a relationship with Him, to know Him deeply, and to remain in Him forever.

QUESTION 2:

What impacts you most about this first day of creation?

Genesis 1:26-27

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

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

KEY WORD: Image (v. 26)—Humanity’s reflection of God. It cannot be reduced to a list of qualities. Instead, it encompasses every aspect of our being.

Perhaps you are familiar with the idea of religious icons. They are small, representative figures that people look at to remind them to think about someone or something else. For example, some Christians look at the image of the cross, and that image causes them to contemplate Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. (Unfortunately, some people tend to worship an icon rather than the One it represents.)

Many of us use icons everyday—and we don’t even know it. They are tied to the apps on our smartphones. Tap on a picture on the home screen and an application launches. The word for that picture is an *icon*: an image that points you somewhere else.

In Genesis 1:26-27, the word translated *image* is the Hebrew word *selem*. The word is used sixteen times in the Old Testament, and most of the time it is used negatively. For example: “Then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places” (Num. 33:52). However, in Genesis 1, God was not talking about stone images, icons, or

apps on phones. He was talking about us, and He said something amazing about how He made us.

To be made in the image of God means we were made with something the rest of creation doesn't have. Think about what makes humanity different from, say, the dog lying on your floor or the cat curled up by the window. Our ability to think, reason, and process morality is different. We have the capacity to adapt and tame the land around us, no matter what that land looks like. But the most unique thing about us is that we were created to be God's representatives. God made everything, but He made humanity with the unique responsibility of being His representatives on Earth.

QUESTION 3:

Why is it significant that we were created in the image of God?

As His image-bearers, we were created to rule over the animals and over the earth. The Hebrew word *rada* is translated *have dominion* and means “to subjugate, to have dominion, or to reign.” Humans made in God's image are capable of thinking, discerning, and making choices as God's ruling representatives—of governing the earth in His place. In caring for God's creation, including its creatures, we should seek to use—not abuse or misuse—what God has provided us.

God has blessed the use of the planet's renewable and nonrenewable natural resources. As God's appointed rulers, we should seek His wisdom as we make decisions about the use of the earth's resources. If we make decisions selfishly and with shortsightedness, we cannot expect to “have dominion over ... all the earth” with integrity the way God intended. God gave all of us the responsibility to care for the earth; at the same time, we are to use the earth's resources for the betterment of humanity. Prayer and godly counsel are needed as we seek to rule the earth and its resources with wisdom.

When the world looks at us, they shouldn't see people simply living for themselves, but people carrying out the highest calling imaginable: displaying the image of the God who made us, doing everything we can to bring Him honor and glory.

QUESTION 4:

How would you describe the responsibility humanity was given at creation?

Genesis 1:28-31

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

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

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

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

KEY WORD: **Subdue** (v. 28)—To bring into subjection. However, while humans are called to put creation under their authority, this is only possible as they stand under God's authority.

As beings created in His image, God didn't just place us in an elevated position in creation to sit and bask in it; He tasked us with being caretakers and to live in a way that brings honor to Him. God gave us three tasks.

1. Be fruitful and fill the earth.
2. Subdue the earth.
3. Relish everything that God made, because He made it all to be enjoyed.

We have been tasked with filling the earth and tending to it. But these commands go far deeper than just populating the earth; it is about spreading God's image far and wide. Moreover, these commands did not go away after sin entered our world. We are still in charge of the earth, but after sin it would require hard work. Ruling over the creatures also comes with its own set of unique challenges. The work can be exhausting, but it can also be very rewarding. God blesses us as we take charge of what He's given us—and when we do it in a way that honors Him.

God not only gives us direction on what to do, however; He also provides what we need to sustain life. Verses 29-30 point to some ways God has blessed us by listing the plants, seeds, and fruits He provided for food. God is the benevolent Provider. He has ensured both humans and animals will have all they need to survive. The “self-made person” is a myth, but the God-blessed person is a reality, because of His abundant provision.

The word used in verse 31 for *saw* carries the idea of looking with the intention of making a judgment. As soon as His creation was complete, He appraised it like a craftsman looking over His work. He had only one judgment: “it was very good.”

As we live as Christians in the world God made, we have the unique opportunity to exemplify the kind of life God created us to live. Think of how blessed we are: we get to know our Creator in a personal way, we get to care for His creation, and we get to be His image-bearers. This realization leads us to see things differently.

- ▶ It changes the way we see the people around us: they also were created to be image-bearers.
- ▶ It changes the way we see the earth around us: we have been tasked to care for it.

- ▶ It changes the way we see ourselves: we have within us the very markings the Creator gave us to represent Him.

QUESTION 5:

How do these verses summarize our mission and purpose as stewards of God's creation?

ENGAGE

We are bearers of God's image, or reflections of His nature and qualities. Choose one of the pictures below that best represents bearing God's image.



Now share why you chose that image with two other people.

LIVE IT OUT

Being made in the image of God is a great blessing and a huge responsibility. Consider the following action steps:

- ▶ **Praise.** Take a few minutes to thank God for creating you—and then thank Him for creating you in His image. Ask for His help to live out this great privilege and responsibility.
- ▶ **List.** Write down a few characteristics that God’s image-bearers should have and evaluate yourself on them. How can you better represent the Lord?
- ▶ **Disciple.** We are to lead others to know and grow in Christ, the One who restores the sin-marred image of God in us. Make a plan to reach out to two other people in your life with whom you can begin meeting regularly so that you can help them to be like Him.

