

# God Creates Humanity in His Image

Genesis 1:26-2:25

## Focus Verse

“Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ ” – Genesis 1:26

- God Completes His Creation – Genesis 1:26-2:3
- God Creates and Commissions Adam and Eve – Genesis 2:4-25

## Engage

The truth that Almighty God is Creator sets in motion many deep and practical realities. By merely speaking, God created this world and everything in it. But unlike plant and animal life, people stand unique among God's creation. How do you explain the difference between people and even the most intelligent animal? **Beyond our superior intelligence and communication skills, human beings relate to our Creator in completely unique ways.** Why is this so, and what does it mean? If God is my Creator, He designed me uniquely, not just to exist. What does this say about my unique talents, gifts and even weaknesses? What is my response to my Creator?

The creation accounts in Genesis help us. Genesis 1 reveals the powerful Creator responsible for this world. Genesis 2 reveals the intimate Lord God, who formed Adam, breathed into his nostrils and made him a living being. We see our God as both the booming voice of Genesis 1 and the gentle breath of Genesis 2. God created man and woman in His own image. **God's image gives every person dignity, worth and purpose.** You are uniquely designed to know the God who made you, in this life and for eternity. How will the truth that God knows you completely and loves you unconditionally impact your life, your week, your day?

## God Completes His Creation – Genesis 1:26-2:3

### God Creates Mankind – 1:26-27

On the sixth day of creation, God filled the created world with land animals.<sup>1</sup> God planned His creative work carefully, much like parents prepare nurseries for their expected children. The right atmosphere, lights, seasons, vegetation and living creatures stood ready for the pinnacle of God's creation. **God announced His divine resolution: “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness ....”**

#### “Let us”

Genesis 1:26 seems to invite us into a conversation between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. “Let us” reflects the united will of the triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **All three persons of God worked in perfect unity in creation.** God exists as one divine being in three co-equal, co-eternal persons, distinct, yet indivisible. This truth, not fully explained here, is progressively revealed throughout the Bible.

#### “Make mankind”

Until this point, God simply commanded, “Let there be ...” (1:3); “Let the land produce ...” (1:11); “Let the

water teem ...” (1:20). Here, “Let us make” highlights the unique relationship and action of God invested to create humanity. **God personally created people in His image.** Genesis 1:27 repeats three times that God directly created mankind (*bara*). The Hebrew *adam* refers here to mankind, both male and female. The repetition emphasizes that God views human beings, made in His image, as the high point of His creation.

#### “In our image, in our likeness”

The intentional pairing of these phrases emphasizes the unique relationship of God and humanity. **The purpose and identity of mankind centers on God and being made in His likeness.** This stands in stark contrast to the birds and animals, created “according to their kind.” As the apex of God's creation, every person is:

- **identified** as belonging to God our Creator.
- **created** in the image of God to glorify Him.
- **intended** to relate to God and all creation in peace.
- **designed** as a co-regent with God over creation.

## Made in God's Image

God's unique connection to human life emerges clearly in Genesis. "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness ..." (Genesis 1:26). God shares His breath of life with mankind (Genesis 2:7). **God's life and image impart dignity and sacredness to all human life.** The entire Bible consistently underscores this truth.<sup>2</sup> Throughout church history, this truth has been captured in the Latin phrase *imago Dei*, which literally means "image of God."

**The way we relate to God and one another reflects God's image.** Reason, emotion and will are foundational elements of human personality shared with God and other people. God expresses all these perfectly. While human expressions are imperfect, our capacity to relate in all these ways reflects God's image in us. God's thoughts are not limited by any flaw, and He balances all interests in absolute perfection. Humans make reasoned decisions and explore the deeper meaning of life. God's character includes love, joy, hate and peace.<sup>3</sup> God designed people to experience joy and pleasure. We enjoy beauty, delicious food, art, fragrances, music and fine craftsmanship. God demonstrates perfect relationship among the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We yearn for satisfying human relationships.

Every human life holds value beyond the shallow measurements of external beauty, exceptional intellect or astounding accomplishments. **Our human longing for identity and significance can only be satisfied when we understand our value to God.** Deep within, our hearts long to know the God who knows us. We wrongly idolize many things because God instilled in us a need to worship Him. Finding identity and purpose in anything but God leaves us wanting.

Acknowledging God as the source of human dignity raises our passion to alleviate human suffering. The atrocity of human trafficking, murder, racial injustice, mistreatment of the disabled and elderly, and other social issues gain context when we view people as image-bearers. We can love and accept people not like us because we understand what binds us together as humans created in God's image. To fail to see God's imprint on humanity steals the worth and value God intended for all people. Without our life centered on God, we value things more than people and our own comfort over the welfare of others. **Recognizing the image of God stamped on humanity changes the way we view ourselves and others.**

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### God Blesses Humanity's Purpose – 1:28-31

God's words in Genesis 1:28-31 explain why we were created. God's blessing reveals His provision, purpose and pleasure for mankind among all creation.

God explains His provision. He gave plants over all the earth to provide food for animals and people. **God exists not only as Creator, but also Provider and Sustainer of all He has made.**

God defines His purpose for mankind. These commands, known as the Cultural Mandate, extend far beyond Adam and Eve. **God calls people to meaningful relationships and work.**

- **Be fruitful and multiply** – Steward relationships in marriage, family and society, devoted to God and to one another.
- **Fill, subdue and rule** – Take responsibility to represent God and to work with others as caretakers of God's creation.

God's work and human work emerge together in this passage. God declares His pleasure about His completed work of creation – it was "very good." He gave Adam specific work in the perfect garden He

made. **God entrusts people with the capacity and desire for meaningful work.** God intended that people find pleasure in Him and His purposes.

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### God Establishes the Sabbath – 2:1-3

Chapter 2:1-3 completes the creation account by recording the seventh day. On this day, the Lord God rested, blessed the day and made it holy. God did not rest because He was tired or out of ideas. **God rested because His creation was complete and to provide the example for humans to follow.** God celebrated the completed *goodness* of His work.

God set apart the seventh day, or "made it holy," for His special use. **God set a pattern that one day each week should celebrate the wholeness, excellence and glory of His mighty person and work.** After the Exodus,<sup>4</sup> God commanded Moses to establish the seventh day as the Sabbath, part of the covenant law for His people. Keeping the day holy consistently upheld God as the source and center of individual lives and the community.

At creation, God established the need for human beings to rest. Our minds and bodies cannot sustain

constant pressure without intentional time to replenish. Our spirits need dedicated time to stop activity and focus on God. By God's definition, rest is more than recreation, sleep or mindless entertainment. **True rest comes when we cease striving and find peace and contentment in God and His provisions.** Does your life and schedule intentionally include time to rest, reflect and replenish? Our reluctance to rest may reveal we wrongly believe everything depends on us.

Intentional rest, with deliberate focus on God, postures our hearts and lives to acknowledge God's sovereign control over us and our dependence on Him. You can stop "doing" because God never does.<sup>5</sup> Psalm 46:10 says it beautifully: "Be still, and know that I am God ...." Knowing that God is God allows us to be still. Will you regularly step aside from the frantic pace of the world to quiet yourself before your awesome God?

## God Creates and Commissions Adam and Eve – Genesis 2:4-25

While Genesis 1 gives God's overview of the created world order, Genesis 2 zooms in on the vivid details of God's creation of man and woman. **The central theme of Genesis 2 is the personal relationship of the Lord God and humanity.** It is the only chapter in the entire Bible where this personal relationship between the Creator and His creation is not tainted by sin. Genesis 2 describes the way life was intended to be and indicates the way life in the new heaven and new earth will be one day soon.<sup>6</sup>

### God Gets Personal

The character and person of God exceed human understanding. His attributes are deep wells of truth that we will explore, but not exhaust, for all of eternity. Through studying God's Word and walking daily with Him, we begin to understand truth about God that humbles us and leads to worship. The focus in Genesis 2 now expands beyond the Almighty Creator God, whose unlimited power and creative design exploded in Genesis 1. We now see another remarkable aspect of God's infinite character.

Genesis 2 reveals a different Hebrew name for God than the one given throughout Genesis 1. Different names for each person of the triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – occur throughout the Bible. These names enrich our understanding of the vastness of the praiseworthy nature of God.

- **Chapter 1 uses *Elohim*, translated "God."** This name refers to the fullness of His person and power. *Elohim* is a plural noun, although paired with singular verbs to show plurality or majesty.
- **Chapter 2 uses *Yahweh Elohim*, usually translated "LORD God."** This name refers to His personal revelation and redemption offered so people can know and relate with Him.

### The Lord God Created Adam – 2:4-7

**God's creation of Adam reveals sacred, mysterious and intimate truths.** God formed Adam's body from the dust of the ground. He breathed the

sacred breath of His own life into Adam's nostrils.<sup>7</sup> Adam became a living being, made in God's image. This account captures God's intimate, personal relationship to mankind that distinguishes humanity from all other creatures. Adam's creation from dust anchors people to the earth, God's creation. Human beings are made in the image of God but are not gods. God shared life with Adam that caused him to "become a living being" and tethers people to God for identity.

God sits enthroned in heaven, highly exalted and worthy of eternal praise. God is exalted above us in every way. He stands apart in unapproachable light.<sup>8</sup> He seeks and draws us to Himself through Christ.

**The tender scene in Genesis 2 helps us understand that God is both transcendent (infinitely greater) and immanent (intimately near).** God's complete knowledge of us and His desire that we know Him should amaze and humble us.

### The Lord God Created Eden – 2:8-17

**God personally planted a garden as home for Adam.** *Eden* means "garden," "paradise" or "delight," and conveys the idea of bliss. God planted a beautiful variety of trees producing all kinds of good food. The Bible also names Eden's rivers and the nearby lands filled with metals and precious stones. While the description of the rivers is literal, there also seems to be spiritual significance. Scripture uses fresh water to symbolize goodness, abundance and eternal life. Where was Eden? Archaeology places the earliest civilization in the modern Tigris-Euphrates area of the Fertile Crescent, near present-day Iraq.

**Two trees planted in the center of Eden are named and bear significance.** The tree of life symbolized the eternal life God gives to human beings. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil represents the one prohibition God gave Adam, testing his trust in God and willingness to live by His Word. Eating from that tree would cause Adam to die, a reality we will study in Genesis 3. Before Adam sinned, he was a "living being" with a "natural body."<sup>9</sup> However, after

## The Doctrine of Humanity – Its Creation and Purposes

**People long for a sense of identity and belonging, looking anywhere and everywhere to find it.** Groups find commonality around shared hobbies and interests. Sports, career, academics, entertainment, fame and many other pursuits offer temporary distraction, but not permanent satisfaction. None of these things are wrong, in and of themselves. We struggle to find permanent fulfillment. Why do so many things in this world come up short?

You were designed to want God intimately. **No higher pursuit exists than to know and worship God.**<sup>10</sup> Our union with God, lost in the fall of mankind into sin, is restored by the perfect sacrifice of God's Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is "made in human likeness."<sup>11</sup> His earthly life and sacrificial death to redeem His people confirms human dignity. He was raised from death in His glorified physical human body. We shall one day see this human and divine person, Christ Jesus. Believers will be like Him in the Resurrection.<sup>12</sup> He made a way for us to enter fellowship with God, starting in this life and culminating in the very presence of God for all eternity.

God knows everything about you. Nothing about you limits His love for you. God desires intimacy and fellowship with you in every aspect of your being – physical, emotional, intellectual, experiential and spiritual. **The most fulfilling life is one lived in constant awareness of God's unfailing love and constant presence.** He delights in you. He wants you to grow to know Him better and trust Him more. When you fail to understand, acknowledge and yield to the Creator, you limit your options for fulfillment and stability to this volatile world and your circumstances. Only Eternal God connects with your eternal soul and loves you as no human can.

Recognize God as responsible not just for your existence, but for your intrinsic worth and highest purpose. You can comfortably rest in His tender care. Fellowship with God also prepares you to relate rightly with other people. Live your life with purpose, transcending all that fades, rusts and spoils in this world.

**Your greatest source of stability, fulfillment and hope is found in knowing the God who knows you.**

Adam and Eve sinned, God blocked their access to the tree of life. God's ultimate purpose is that our natural bodies become glorified bodies that are incorruptible and immortal through salvation in Jesus Christ.

### The Lord God Educated Adam – 2:15-20

In verse 18, the Lord God announced His plan to make a suitable helper for Adam, as it was not good for him to be alone. But before God created Eve, He prepared Adam. Untouched by sin, Adam lived in a constant, intimate and peaceful relationship with the Lord God. God gave him meaningful work to develop all his abilities. God instructed Adam to cultivate the garden and name the animals. God had several purposes for Adam as He brought each animal to him:

- **Intellectual growth** and personal **enjoyment**
- **Practice** in caring for the animals because all were subject to him
- **Awareness** of the great gulf between even the most intelligent animal and himself – only he was made in God's image.
- **Recognition** that God planned male and female beings to work together in reproduction, raising offspring and preserving their communities. Adam discovered no animal could meet his own need for human companionship or a suitable helper.

### The Lord God Created Eve – 2:21-23

God met Adam's need for companionship and fulfillment. **God personally, miraculously and intimately created Eve.** She represented God's love, care and purpose for humanity. The Hebrew noun *ezer* (translated "helper") is used throughout the Old Testament, and it identifies those giving vital, powerful assistance, even rescue. Often this word is used in reference to God.<sup>13</sup> God helped Adam. God's formation of the woman repeats the intimacy portrayed in His creation of the man in a similar, yet distinctive way. He made Eve from a rib out of Adam's side. This means she shared the same nature of body, soul and spirit as Adam. Eve bore God's image and breath of life, just like Adam. Therefore, Adam and Eve belonged to God and were to love and help one another as one flesh. Adam offered his joyful response to God's gift of Eve in verse 23.

**Creation was not complete until God created woman to steward the earth alongside the man.**

*Together* they shared stewardship of creation as vice-regents of God. Male and female, individually and together, reflect the image of God. God designed the differences between men and women to complement one another.



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## The Lord God Created Marriage – 2:24-25

God established marriage and the family unit to bless and stabilize humanity. God designed the covenant relationship of marriage, the spiritual and physical bond whereby man and woman become one flesh. God's love for humanity incorporates marriage. In deep and symbolic ways, marriage illustrates the love of Christ Jesus for His bride, His people, His Church.<sup>14</sup> Marriage, the foundational block of societal order, reflects this cooperation in a human context.

The gap between God's beautiful intention for marriage and everyday reality can puzzle us. Many long for marriage or live in a marriage that does not measure up to God's plan. God desires and works for our good, regardless of our situation. Living a life of conscious worship of God represents the highest purpose for every person created in God's image. While life on this earth may not fulfill every dream, God's presence and the eternal hope He gives provide the context needed for both the challenges and joys of daily life.

## Take to Heart

### Hold Fast

Genesis 1 presents an overarching view of God's creation of the universe and of people in His image. Genesis 2 reveals God's intimate formation of the first man and woman. These two pictures illustrate the vastness within God's character and help us know and relate to God. God is all-powerful. He can do anything effortlessly and without depleting His inexhaustible resources. God is all-knowing. He knows every detail about everything and weaves that information together with complete and seamless understanding. God's love is intensely personal. The God who created us by His power knows us completely and loves us perfectly. These truths about our Creator impact us in every way. God created us with the unique capacity to know Him and relate to Him. All lesser pursuits pale and fail by comparison. **Knowing God fulfills man's deepest longings and highest purpose.**

Everything in creation, and especially humanity, reflects God's greatness. **God entrusted the care of this world to mankind, offering fulfillment through responsibility and meaningful work.** At its core, good work serves others and brings order to creation. Many people wrestle with the value of their work. We honor God and His goals for us as we serve others by our work, whether in a paid vocation, volunteer roles or in our homes.

**God's rest after creation expressed His satisfaction.** Keeping the Sabbath distinguished Israel as God's people. They put daily work aside to enjoy relationship with God and one another. Israel's Sabbath was also related to God's promise of Canaan – the land of a productive, peaceful life with God.<sup>15</sup> The book of Hebrews relates "Sabbath rest" to the security and peace of salvation.<sup>16</sup> Believers "rest" because Jesus paid the penalty for their sin and credits them with His righteousness.

### Apply It

In the age of social media, we can project an image of ourselves that only includes flattering photos, stories of success and a persona we want others to value. We can draw our self-image from how we think others perceive or judge us. But behind the curtain, we want to be known and understood in the intimate way only God can know us. God understands us better than we understand ourselves. Yet, there are some things we would prefer to hide. How do you relate to the God who knows your heart, motives and thoughts? God not only knows everything about

you, He desires a relationship with you. **The God who is infinitely higher desires to be intimately close.** His image within you is the most important image of all. This week, how will you respond to the Almighty, who chooses to draw near to you? How will you allow Him to fulfill your deepest longings?

Scientific discoveries through the Human Genome Project verify the biblical account of Adam and Eve. We all descend from one ancestor, as "from one man [God] made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth."<sup>17</sup> In light of this, why are

there racial tensions often rooted in skin color? Even more, has God not made believers all one in Christ? How will these truths impact your thoughts and actions toward those who are different from you?

**God designed people to find fulfillment in work and replenishment in rest.** Our physical bodies, minds, emotions and spirits need both. Do you find yourself in roles filled with pressure, isolation, boredom or strife? Do your daily tasks bring relational struggles or obstacles? Whatever your situation, God offers you an opportunity

to reflect His image and find fulfillment in Him. How might a deliberate focus on God, your value to Him and His work in you help you? God set aside one day to rest, reflect, replenish and worship. You

need time to think about His love for you and weigh your concerns and joys against what is right and true. Your body and soul need time to breathe. You need time with friends and family to laugh and

enjoy God's provisions. Worship includes daily surrender but also dedicated focus to replenish us. Will you ask God to show you His purpose in your work and His plan for your rest?

## Go Deeper

Check out these footnoted references for further study of God's Word in this week's lesson.

**1: Sixth day:** Genesis 1:24-25

**2: Human dignity:** Genesis 9:5-6; Psalm 8; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10; James 3:8-9

**3: God's emotions:** Deuteronomy 7:7-8; Proverbs 6:16; Isaiah 63:9; Zephaniah 3:17; Philippians 4:7; 1 John 4:16

**4: Sabbath law at Mt. Sinai:** Exodus 20:8-11

**5: The Father and Son at work:** John 5:17

**6: New heaven and new earth:** Revelation 21

**7: God's breath of life:** Job 12:10; 32:8; 33:4; John 20:22

**8: God's transcendence:** 1 Samuel 2:2; 1 Timothy 6:16

**9: Human bodies:** 1 Corinthians 15:44-50, 53-54

**10: Worship God:** Matthew 22:37-38

**11: In human likeness:** Philippians 2:6-8

**12: Like Him:** 1 John 3:2

**13: God as helper:** Psalms 54:4; 121; Isaiah 41:10; John 14:26; Philippians 4:13; Hebrews 4:16

**14: God's love:** Isaiah 62:5; Ezekiel 16:1-14; Hosea 2:19-20; Ephesians 5:25-33; Revelation 21:9

**15: Promised land:** Joshua 1:13; 21:44

**16: Sabbath rest:** Hebrews 4:7-11

**17: One blood:** Acts 17:26