

## **Theme 1: Seeing Creation as It Was Meant to Be<sup>1</sup>**

Now we come to God's creation of the universe, and there is so much to say. But as we step into Genesis 1 and 2 and the making of all things – let us pause and consider.

It's tempting to rush into Genesis 3, to the serpent, the Fall, and the need for salvation. Yes, sin is coming. Yes, the world will be broken. But do not go there yet. Before moving forward, behold the awesome reality of what once was.

Genesis 1-2 opens a window into the unspoiled design of God, a world of like, beauty, order, and wonder. This beauty isn't subjective. It's objective because it flows from the One who is good, true, and beautiful. The world He called "very good" reflects His splendor and wisdom.

Linger here to see God's heart for His creation. Capture the harmony between heaven and earth, between man and woman, between Creator and the created order. It is creation as it was meant to be: "God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good." (Genesis 1:31).

Seeing God's creation as it was designed grounds our view of His goodness, His design, and His delight in what He made. The beauty of the created order and God's purpose for it can take our breath away.

When we've seen what was, we can begin to grasp the weight of what was lost. And when we grasp what was lost, we begin to long for what will be regained. We then appreciate what God is doing through Jesus to save and restore all things (Acts 3:21). The One who created all things will one day make all things new. It readies our hearts to hope for what will one day return.

So let the wonder of Genesis 1-2 wash over you. Let your heart rest here, even if only for a moment.

***Storyline Focus – Linger in Eden awakens our hearts  
to what was lost and what God will one day restore.***

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<sup>1</sup> The series content is from Michael Vlach's book, *The Bible Storyline: God's Unstoppable Plan to Defeat Evil, Restore Creation, and Establish His Kingdom on Earth*, available for purchase in our Resource Center.

## **Theme 2: From Nothing to Everything: God's Masterpiece Begins**

The loving, all-powerful Creator speaks the universe into existence out of nothing, with no preexisting materials. He does not need to do this. His existence is not dependent on the universe. But in love He chooses to do so. In six days, each day marked by morning and evening, the Artist created.

He starts with the broad elements before narrowing in on the exquisite creatures that will inhabit the earth. He speaks light into existence (Day 1) and then separates the waters, forming the vast expanse of the sky (Day 2).

Next comes land, seas, and vegetation (Day 3). Then He forms the cosmic lights – sun, moon, and stars (Day 4) to govern time and mark days, years, and seasons. Day 5 brings teeming sea creatures and birds.

Day 6 introduces the majestic land animals and, finally the high point, man, the image-bearer who is tasked with ruling and stewarding creation.

Surveying it all, God's creative work also established boundaries – light from darkness, waters from land, day from night. Creation is ordered. Every realm and creature is in its place. This ordering reveals God's wisdom and ongoing purpose to bring harmony.

Then on the seventh day, God rests, not because He is weary, but to declare His work finished. With creation week completed, rhythm is established and the world is ready to flourish under His blessing.

Creation is a coherent whole. Every square inch and creature has purpose, intricately woven with breathtaking precision, reflecting God's wisdom and glory. Yet within this unity is astonishing diversity. Each category – vegetation, cosmic bodies, sea creatures, birds, animals, and mankind – contains distinctions.

The created order is vast and beautiful, bursting with life and wonder. While “very good,” it is also untamed and wild, designed with purpose, but requiring human stewardship to reach its potential.

Unlike many worldviews, ancient and modern, that see the material world as flawed or less important, the Bible presents creation as good, purposeful, and worth caring for. The world isn't an accident or something to escape. God made a real, physical world and called it “very good.”

Mountains, oceans, trees, and stars are meaningful because they're part of His wise and loving design. The physical world matters because it came from the mind of God.

Creation, then, is a masterpiece of wisdom and intention, just as Proverbs 8:22-30 portrays. Every sunrise, every wave, every mountain peak declares His glory (Psalm 19:1-6). He delights in what He made.

The created order stands as a visible, unceasing testimony to the God who is there, leaving no excuse for denial:

*For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.*  
(Romans 1:20a)

***Storyline Focus – God speaks the universe into existence, revealing His wisdom, power, and delight in a world called “very good.”***

### **Theme 3: The Non-Disposable Planet: Why Creation Matters to God**

Six times, Genesis 1 declares creation “good.” God then goes ever further, declaring everything He made “very good” (Genesis 1:31). This truth is stunning. Every part of creation matters. Its space, structure, and life contain intrinsic value because He made it.

The universe is not disposable or a temporary platform for spiritual matters, even though some worldviews have treated it that way. Eastern religions see the material realm as an illusion. Platonism downplays the importance of the physical. Some theologians of the Middle Ages taught that the earth would be vacated and devoid of all life in eternity. For them, God's people abandon the earth entirely and ascend to a spiritual realm, leaving creation behind.

But this is not true. The earth is not a mere stage for man's salvation, nor are its creatures just props to be discarded when the story ends, like a film set abandoned after the director yells, “Cut!”

God's creation is sacred. It is also headed for renewal.

The prophets echoed this hope by envisioning a renewed earth. Isaiah 35 speaks of parched lands becoming an oasis. Then Isaiah 65 speaks of new heavens and a new earth where vineyards bloom and houses are built.

In Matthew 19:28, Jesus said His kingdom would bring “regeneration” to the world. Peter echoed this in Acts 3:21, when he spoke of the coming “restoration of all things.” Paul declared that “the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Romans 8:21).

Though much of the Bible's narrative concerns God's plan to save people, we must not lose sight of the value of creation itself. The heavens and the earth, and everything within them, are precious to God and significant to His eternal purposes.

Every tree that rustles in the wind, every bird that sings, every mountain that pierces the sky – all of it was born from God's delight and speaks of His glory. This truth is woven throughout Scripture, culminating in the vision of a new heaven and a new earth in Revelation 21-22.

God's Story is about restoring all things – people, places, and the physical world. The universe groans now, but it will one day sing.

In future sessions, we'll explore how Jesus' return will restore this world to declare His glory once more.

***Storyline Focus – Creation is sacred to God, filled with worth, and destined for renewal under His plan***

#### **Theme 4: The Crown of Creation: Man's Unique Place in God's World**

As Day 6 of creation week unfolded, the world teemed with life: trees and grass, birds in the sky, beasts on the earth, creatures great and small. Yet something, or rather, *someone*, was missing. The culmination of God's handiwork had not yet appeared.

This soon changed. God made man last on the sixth day. This does not mean that man is of lesser value. In fact, man's placement at the end emphasizes that he is the pinnacle of God's work.

God brings creation into being primarily through speech. But with man, there is a personal touch. God doesn't just speak – He forms man from the dust of the ground. As Genesis 2:7 says, "Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." This highlights a more intimate, hands-on act of the Creator.

In Hebrew, the word for "man" (*adam*) is closely related to the word for "ground" (*adamah*), from which he was formed. This reveals a deep and purposeful connection between humanity and the earth. Man's origin is from the ground, and his vocation is tied to it. He is an earth-connected being, appointed to cultivate and care for the very ground from which he came. This relationship is woven into the fabric of man's identity and mission. Man's destiny is tied to the earth because he was made from it and because he is called to steward it.

As the crown of creation, man was placed into four relationships: with God, with other people, with the earth and its creatures, and even with himself.

To be human, as God intended, was to live whole: at peace with God, in harmony with others, in tune with the created order, and at rest with peace within.

But what exactly makes man the crown of creation? In the next section, we explore one of the Bible's most profound declarations: that man was made in the image and likeness of God.

***Storyline Focus – Humanity, formed from the earth yet bearing God's breath, is called to live whole in every relationship – God, others, creation, and self.***

## **Theme 5: Crowned with Glory: The Image of God and Man's Royal Identity**

Among all the declarations in Genesis 1, none reveals more about man's purpose and dignity than:

*Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness (Genesis 1:26).*

*God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them.  
(Genesis 1:27a)*

This implications of this are immense. Man is both the *image* and *likeness* of God. These terms highlight two complimentary realities – structural and relational.

### Image and Likeness of God

The term “image” is closely connected to representation. An image represents something. In antiquity, kings or rulers set up images of themselves in far-off regions as a visible sign of their authority there. Thus, man was created to represent God. As we will see soon, This representation is to occur on the earth as man is tasked with filling, ruling, and subduing the earth for God's glory (see Genesis 1:26-28). Man is to act as God's representative ruler, exercising His authority over the earthly realm and its creatures. What this ruling authority should look like will be discussed in upcoming sessions. But in short, as God's image-bearer, man is to rule by stewarding creation, building families, cultivating the earth, and bringing order to God's world.

The exact nature of this image is a complex topic. Yet it is best to view man's entire being – his material body and immaterial soul – as comprising God's image. Man, structurally, in his very being, is the image of God. As a complex unity of body and soul, man represents God in the world. This image includes qualities such as personality, self-consciousness, volition, the richness of emotions, a moral awareness of right and wrong, and more. In these ways, man reflects God's communicable attributes. These are divine qualities that find a finite yet genuine correspondence in humanity. Because of this design, man is uniquely positioned to function in God's world and to relate to God and other human beings in a way that glorifies Him. Function involves filling, ruling, and subduing the earth; relating involves loving God and living in relationship with others.

Man is also created in the likeness of God, which highlights his relational connection to God as Father. Man is God's son, formed for personal relationship and communion with God. Genesis 5:1-3 uses "likeness" to describe the bond between Adam and his son Seth. The phrase "in the likeness of God" points to the deeply personal and familial nature of humanity. Man is not only appointed to represent God; he is also His son. Man is created in relationship with his Maker.

The image and likeness of God have profound consequences. They are why every human life is sacred. From the unborn child to the elderly, from the strong to the frail, every person bears God's image. This truth grounds human dignity and demands that we treat every individual, regardless of age, ethnicity, gender, or ability, with respect and honor. Scripture later will reveal that murder and cursing people are wrong because those persons are made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 9:6; James 3:9).

As the storyline of Scripture unfolds, we see that Jesus is the perfect image and likeness of God. He could say, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). The pursuit of the image of God in this present age involves being "conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29). Thus, the original calling of humanity, to reflect God in the world, finds its fullest realization in Christ and in those who are being shaped into His image.

### Practical Implications

The image of God in man is profound and far-reaching. It shapes every part of who we are – our reason, emotions, imagination, will, and moral conscience. This divine imprint reflects God's wisdom and gives us the capacity to think, feel, choose, build, and love. We are designed for meaningful work and creative expression. People are thinkers, artists, scientists, farmers, parents, and builders, called to reflect God's character in every sphere of life.

This image also dignifies work that engages directly with the earth. This involves plowing fields, repairing engines, building homes, or shaping raw materials into something useful. These are not lesser callings but tangible expressions of God's design for humanity to steward and order the world. Because we bear God's image, it is good to engage in cultural, societal, and political endeavors that promote what is good, just, and beautiful. In these ways, we reflect the God whose likeness we bear.

When the world rejects the truth that everyone is made in God's image, human value becomes subjective and negotiable. Worth is no longer anchored in divine design. When societies lose sight of this truth, the consequences are devastating. The door opens to genocide, abortion, euthanasia, racism, and the dehumanizing logic of utilitarianism where people are judged by their usefulness rather than their inherent dignity. In such a world, the most vulnerable are the first to be cast aside. Indeed, most of history's greatest atrocities occurred by trampling the profound truth that every person bears the image of God.

***Storyline Focus – Made in God's image and likeness,  
man is a son and ruler, reflecting God's glory  
and giving dignity to every human life.***