

# Genesis 1.26-31 Sermon / Faith Bible Church / 07.12.20

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## Introduction

- † **[1: Title]** When I was twenty-six, I dropped out of graduate school. I had no career, no direction, no plan, no money, no social life. I was not happy, but none of that was tragic. The tragedy was that I had no sense of purpose in my life; I could not see that life had any meaning; I believed in Jesus, but I had no idea why he had created me, and no clue there was a purpose for which he had saved me.
- In the intervening years, I have observed that many people, even inside the church, struggle with these questions. What about you? If one of the children in this church asked you to explain the meaning of life or God's purpose for you, could you give a biblical answer?
  - Today we will see what the Bible says about God's design for people, because if you understand that, you can understand the meaning of life, your purpose in God's plan; and this information will help you make choices all day, every day. It is powerful stuff!
- † So open your Bible to Genesis 1.26. As we said last week, "genesis" means "beginning" or "source." Genesis is the beginning of the Bible, it depicts the beginning of time, the universe, human history. It reveals God as the source of all creation, and itself is the source of our foundational theology.
- While you could think of Genesis as just one of sixty-six biblical/canonical books, it really is the beginning of one coherent book, inspired and revealed by God. And while the Bible contains many types of writing, the overall structure of the Bible is narrative. This is God's story.
- † Today, we will learn how important we are to God and to his story, but we need to stay humble, because we also will see that even our creation is more about God and his glory than about us. People say the Bible is about our salvation or God's plan for our redemption or how we should live – and the Bible does deal with those issues – but overall the Bible is about God.
- In 1.1-25, we saw that God as author, in a literary sense, used the beginning of the Bible to introduce himself as the protagonist [or hero] of the story.
  - Today, we will learn about God's plan to establish for himself a representative people. Was there anything special about the creation of people? Why did God create people? Do we have a purpose? What does it mean to be made in God's image? Let's read our text and find out!

**[2: 1.26-28]** Genesis 1.26-31 NIV: 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." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

**[3: 1.29-31]** Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

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## God Creates People in His Own Image

- † **[4: us]** Up until now, God created by saying *let there* be light, *let there* be fruit bearing trees. Now God says “Let us make...” It is difficult to know how to take God saying “Let us...” in plural.
- It could be like the word “God” [אֱלֹהִים] is plural, a cultural way to emphasize God’s majesty.
  - God might be deliberating, speaking as we might say to ourselves, “Let’s see what’s on TV.”
  - If Genesis 1 is a historical account of the original creation, God must have created the angels sometime in the first six days, so God could be speaking to the angels here, like we might say to children, “Let’s drive to the store”; obviously only the adult drives, only God creates.
  - Or “Let us” might reflect God the Father speaking to the Son and the Spirit, since we know from later revelation that all three were involved in creation. We cannot say this text *proves* God is triune in nature, but it certainly feeds our understanding of what Jesus revealed.
- † **[5: make]** In any case, the climax of God’s creative work was people. The text structure shows this: we are the final thing God created; in v.26, God changed his method, saying, “*Let us make mankind*”; then v.27 elaborates, repeating the verb “created” as emphasis, to get our attention.
- And then there is the fact that, after God set up the Earth to sustain life and created the plants and animals, he created people in a special way. God created all animal life “according to their kinds,” but vv.26-27 say God created people – both man and woman – *in his own image*.
  - This is tremendously important to understand! Scholar Bruce Waltke wrote, “Fundamental to Genesis and the entirety of Scripture is the creation of humanity in the image of God.” In other words, you cannot fully understand what God is revealing in Genesis or in the rest of the Bible unless you understand what it means that people are created in God’s image. Today we are learning one of the foundational and essential truths in all of scripture!
- † Still in vv.26-27, notice God did not create us to be gods; contrary to new age thinking, God did not create us of the same essence as himself. Rather God created people according to his likeness, to somehow be a faithful representation of himself, but not of the same essence as himself.
- Still, since we are created in God’s image, we exist at a higher level than other forms of life. We are self-aware, able to discern spiritual things, to make moral decisions, to feel moral results in our conscience. We can analyze, synthesize ideas together, and build a logical argument. We can never create something out of nothing, but in a reflection of God we too are creative.
- † **[6: spoke]** Look at vv.28-30: we see that God communicated with the first people, so we infer that people by design can have a relationship with God. We can discern God and yearn for God. In **Psalm 42.2 NIV**, the author exclaimed, “**My soul thirsts for God!**”
- We need human relationship too. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit enjoy fellowship together; so God created us to be in community; this includes church, but the basic form is marriage, family.
- † Now look at v.31: God declared all of creation to be very good. When something is good in God’s sight, there is purity and usefulness for God’s purposes.

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## God Creates People for His Own Purposes.

- † Well then, what was God's purpose in creating people? I think the text reveals four aspects of God's purpose for people: to *reflect* God's character, to *represent* God in our daily lives, to *reproduce* the image of God in others, and to *rule* in God's name over the rest of creation on the Earth.
- † **[7: rule]** Let's start with the last of these, to rule. Look back to v.26: God says he is creating people in his own image **"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."**
- Not all English translations bring out this sense of purpose in the verse, but the Hebrew verb structure makes clear that God created people in his own image *for the purpose of* those people ruling over the rest of creation.
  - **[8: name]** In the ancient near-east, a prince was thought of as the image bearer of the king, ruling in the king's name. Surely if people were to rule as image bearers, God intended for them to rule in *God's* name. Culturally, that meant people were to rule by God's authority, by God's will, by God's direction, and for God's glory. They were to rule *for* God, not in place of God.
  - So when we rule today – whether we are leading people or taming the wilderness in our backyards – we need to stay humble and focused on God's will. When God set Adam, the first person, in the Garden of Eden, we see in **Genesis 2.15 NIV** that God commanded him to **"work it and take care of it."** Part of ruling creation is to care for it; so rather than merely exploiting nature [or other people, for that matter], we are to ensure the long-term well-being of those over whom we rule. We are God's stewards on the Earth. Later revelation in scripture shows we are to rule sacrificially, selflessly; we are to bless creation, not exploit it.
  - How many of you have taken care of someone's house or pets while they were away? Friends do that for me. They enter by my authority, with my key; they are there by my will, because I asked them to be; they follow my typed directions; and they go for my benefit, not their own. They rule over my house and pets, but they do so in ways that please me and benefit the house and pets, not to exploit my house and pets for their own gain. This is what God wants from us.
  - There was no death in the Garden of Eden, yet there is implied in that passage some natural wildness requiring a ruler to subdue and cultivate it. How many of you enjoy looking at well kept gardens? When I lived in Sarasota, I had native plant gardens; even when there were no weeds, the flowers and the gardens as a whole could get unruly, losing some of their beauty and usefulness; so I would walk around for a few minutes each day to do a little pruning, maybe some watering. I did not exploit them, I cared for them, but it was my goal to rule over them.
  - This is God's command and design for people, which should affect our approach to energy, environment, farming, trash, and related fields. We are to rule over creation in God's name.
- † **[9: reproduce]** For our second purpose, look at v.28: God made ruling in his name a command, and God connected this to fulfillment of another purpose which he also commanded: to reproduce the image of God. Let's read it again [NIV]: **God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."**
- The NIV is very literal here: the Hebrew verb [רָבָה] literally means to increase in number, but most English translations render it as what? Be fruitful and... *multiply*. God wants people to

*reproduce*, to be fruitful and multiply, filling the Earth, all of which means we are to raise up children, so that we can effectively rule in God's name over the whole Earth.

- As you study the opening scenes in Genesis, you notice that God provided what was necessary to empower people to fulfill his purposes and obey his commands. Everything about how God made people, from our creative abilities to our direct access to God, illustrates his provision and empowerment. Looking at v.29, we see another example in God's provision of seed plants and fruit for the human diet. Later [2.6] we see God also provided springs of fresh water.
- God's blessing, his provision, also included fruitfulness, the ability to reproduce. The world would be filled with plants and animals, as all of nature was healthy and able to reproduce. This blessing was improved for people, because we could reproduce not only a baby human, but also the image of God! After reiteration that God made Adam and Eve in his own image, **Genesis 5.3 NIV** says Adam "**had a son in his own likeness, in his own image and he named him Seth.**"
- Like everything else, man and woman reproduce after their kind, so generations will be like their parents; but man and woman were made in God's image, so they were in this sense like their Father, God, and could reproduce his image in their children.
- **[10: so as to rule]** Look at it this way: v.28 is a command to multiply people *so as* to rule in God's name, but the only way filling the earth with people would help us rule in God's name was if we were multiplying the image of God in those people. God invested spiritual life in people and blessed them to procreate that spiritual life in new physical life, in their babies. This is one of the greatest blessings in the creation!
- Sadly, the fall into sin corrupted human nature, with the result that now not everyone can physically reproduce. Even in Old Testament Israel, the reproductive promise was conditioned on the nation walking with God by obeying the Mosaic Covenant; if they honored God, he would prevent the corruption from disrupting fertility. We do not have even that promise, so male and female infertility is possible and not a sign of personal disfavor, it's a result of our corruption.
- Another result of our corruption is that when we reproduce physical life into new babies, they are conceived spiritually dead, which is to say they inherit our corruption – called inherited sin – and thus need a savior to bring them into spiritual life and relationship with God. To reproduce the image of God, we must strive to raise up our children to know God and walk in his ways.
- **[11: Matthew]** As a consequence of our corruption, many people are not raised this way. Thus we have another way to reproduce: we can share gospel truth with people so they come to faith in the identity of Christ and the work he accomplished for them in his crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus made this clear when he commanded the church to go and make disciples. Turn to **Matthew 28.18-20 NIV: Then Jesus came to them** [the eleven remaining apostles, this is post-resurrection] **and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me [by God the Father]. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."**
- The command is to bring people to saving faith, new spiritual life, baptizing them into the church, then raising them up to walk with God by obeying his revelation. Spiritual reproduction is part of our purpose of being created in God's image, and it is the mission God gave the church for this time period. So reproducing the image of God should be one of our top priorities in life.
- If you have children, raise them up to know God, believe in Jesus, and be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Whether or not you have children, learn how to share the gospel, then lovingly do

so with lost people, and grow spiritually yourself to be involved in the teaching and mentoring ministries of the church. It is God's purpose for every believer to reproduce God's image.

- † **[12: reflect]** For our third purpose, let's go back to v.26 and talk about the word "image." When you look in a mirror, what do you see? your image, your likeness. How accurate is it, if the mirror is perfect? perfectly accurate: what you see is a reflection, a representation of yourself.
- So when God made Adam and Eve in his own image, what did this imply? They were to be reflections of God. We have mentioned a few ways this is true, like our abilities to reason and discern spiritual things. Now let's focus on another: God wants people to reflect his character.
  - As Christian parents, do we hope our children will reflect our morals and beliefs? Of course, and so too God hopes his children will reflect his morals and beliefs. Even as a narrative, the Bible is filled with theological truth and moral guidance, so we can learn to reflect God's image well.
  - **[13: son]** I mentioned before that we now are born with a corruption to our nature. This is like the mirror being cracked or warped: our reflection of God now is imperfect, sometimes barely discernable. Only Jesus perfectly reflected God the Father, because he was sinless as a person, and he also is the divine Son of God. **Colossians 1.15 NIV: The Son is the image of the invisible God...** So if we become like Christ, we become the image of God we were created to be.
  - Fortunately, we don't have to do this in our own power. When we are spiritually born again, we enter the process of progressive sanctification, by which the Holy Spirit transforms us to be less corrupted and sinful, to be more pure and good like Christ. **Romans 8.29 NIV: For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...** who [we just read] is the image of God the Father. The Holy Spirit is making us into the people God created us to be!
  - **[14: new self]** While the Holy Spirit does the heavy work, God has given us some responsibility in this. **Ephesians 4.22-24 NIV: You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new [or be renewed; ἀνανεώω] in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.** Though we suffer with sinful corruption, we are called to pursue spiritual renewal so we again can reflect the righteousness and holiness of God.
  - This is important because we cannot rule in God's name if we are not exhibiting his character; we would deviate from his plans, methods, and values. Character and mission are integrated in God's plan. You cannot be holy and obedient if you are not missional; you are not carrying out the mission if you are not pursuing holiness.
  - We also cannot be effective witnesses [spiritually reproducing] if we live like those who do not know Christ; if there is no difference in us, there is no effective witness. Priest Brennan Manning said, "The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips and walk out the door and deny Him by their lifestyle."
- † **[15: represent]** That brings us to the fourth purpose: to represent God. God intended for the human family to work together to rule the Earth in his name, and God created the concepts of marriage and family, as we learn in Genesis 2. While people were ruling and reproducing together, they certainly were interacting with each other. How were they to interact with each other?
- Think about what you know of the Bible's moral teaching: how much of it pertains to how we treat each other? A lot, right? The context of all biblical teaching is community, relationships; in

the New Testament, we get over forty “one-another” commands, because we need to give and receive those things together in order to be spiritually and emotionally healthy and growing.

- It is not stated overtly in Genesis 1, but it is clear looking ahead in the story, that God intended people to represent him in their interactions with each other. This is another reason it is so important that we learn to reflect his character: we cannot represent God to each other if we do not reflect him.
- In the Ancient Near East, an image like a statue represented a king or pagan god. We represent the true God by sharing his truth and love with others, as we reflect his character in the way we live. In every situation, we should be God’s man, God’s woman on the ground. We take a stand for justice and help the downtrodden; we try to shape society to reflect God’s values and truths.

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## Christ and Our Purpose

- † **[16: circles]** Let’s take a look at this graphic illustration. The three circles represent the creation relationship: God as sovereign creator is in authority over the human family. The purpose of the human family is to be God’s image by reflecting God’s character, representing God in daily life, reproducing God’s image everywhere, and ruling over creation in God’s name.
- † As you study the Bible, it is important to remember that God never changes, God’s character never changes, and God’s initial purposes for people – which we discussed today – never change; but over time, God has provided to his people unique guidance for each historical period.
  - As you read more of Genesis, you learn more about the mission and guidance God gave the first family, but we can sum it up as we just did with our first three circle diagram.
  - **[17: Israel]** Later, when all of humanity was failing at this and were in rebellion against God, God selected one family to develop into his representative people. This was the family of Abraham, which became the nation of Israel. They were to reflect God’s character, represent God to each other and the other nations, and reproduce God’s image by raising up children to walk with God and influencing foreigners to worship God. They will rule the nations with Christ as their king.
  - **[18: church]** Now the church is to reflect God’s character and represent God to all people groups of the world [to the people who do not know God]. We do not rule these people groups, but we are supposed to influence culture and law as God’s representatives, to take care of nature, and to reproduce through raising up our children and discipling others to know and walk with God.
  - When Jesus returns, he will fulfill all three models [as the head of the human family, the king ruling over Israel and the world, and the head of the church], then God will have a truly representative people on the earth. From Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, one prominent theme is of God establishing for himself this representative people. Keeping that in mind will help you make sense of the commands Jesus gave to us and the ways God interacted with Israel.

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## Every Life is Sacred

- † **[19: sacred]** Now think about this: *if all people are made in God’s image, then every human life is sacred.* As we studied today, God’s plan and purpose for us was that with each pregnancy, we would procreate a new spiritual life. While it is true that every child is conceived with corruption, and thus needs a savior in Jesus, every child has a soul, has spiritual potency, carries inherent within the original design of being the image of God. Thus there is sanctity in all human life.

- That means every child, every fetus, is a blessing. That is why abortion is a sin. That is why suicide and assisted suicide are sins. That is why God told Noah in **Genesis 9.6 NET: “Whoever sheds human blood, by other humans must his blood be shed; for in God's image God has made humankind.”** That is why every person in this room, in our schools, in our slums, is important and valuable; every person through procreation is created in the image of God.
- † When we get old, even if we have the hope of deliverance into Heaven, we can get emotionally distraught as we struggle physically and mentally, as we realize we no longer can do what we want or help others. Yet we must always remember that each life is a sacred gift, each of us carries the image of God, and we cannot know what reason God has in keeping us here as his representatives.
- Another thought. I hope our teenage girls will present their husbands with the gift of their virginity on their wedding night; I hope our teenage boys will do the same for their brides. But while I would share a parent’s concern and grief over a teenage pregnancy, our reaction should include rejoicing at the miraculous gift of new life, new life which carries the image of God.
  - Now let’s talk about our neighbors who are poor, struggle with addiction, have committed crimes, have debilitating illnesses, are mentally or emotionally challenged, and have cultural behaviors that work against them in life. It is true that some of them have dug their own holes. But every one of them is created in the image of God, so we should love them and proactively seek to help them come to Christ and improve their lives.
- † **[20: you]** We *should* find this passage encouraging. One of the important things you should remember from all this is that you have significance in the universe; you have value, purpose, validation, and identity, because you were created in God’s image.
- Certainly this blessing comes with responsibility: I hope this sermon has given you a lot to think about; but just as in Genesis, it all starts with God empowering and blessing you! And no matter what difficulties you face in life, they never reflect a downturn in your value or significance: you are God’s woman or God’s man, put here for his purposes, made in his image, so you are tremendously significant and valuable, no matter what.
  - Your life will have its ups and downs; so will your performance in it. Your career, your finances, your popularity, your influence, your success in meeting goals, your contentment, your family, your friendships... all will have their ups and downs. But your value, your significance, your purpose, your identity will *not* fluctuate because they are based on being created in God’s image, redeemed by the blood of Christ, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit.
  - Right now, no matter how well or badly you are doing in life or in representing God, you are important to God! Many of us suffer from anxiety, depression, or stress because we are insecure about our sense of self-worth. We search for significance through achievement, popularity, or wealth. What we really need is to sense that we are valued by God. I hope this sermon will help you see that you have value by God’s design.
  - **[21: web]** [devotion] Spend some time reflecting on the truth that God created you in his own image; Jesus died so you could be in relationship with God; the Holy Spirit has indwelt you so that you can experience empowerment and transformation to be, and carry out your purpose as, the image of God. Nothing in the universe is as significant and important as you! Let’s pray...