

# Identity

## CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE AND IDENTITY

Focal Verses • GENESIS 1:26–31, 2:4–7

### Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **EXAMINE** God's role for humanity in the created world; **CONSIDER** ourselves and others as part of God's creation; and **REFLECT** on our role as stewards in God's creation.

#### In Focus

Robbie knew his entire life that one day, he would have to take over his dad's business. Jenkins Construction and Management Company has helped people build, repair, expand, and renovate their homes and businesses on the city's west side for decades. People had come to expect that if something went wrong, Mr. Jenkins would know how to handle the situation. Even those slow to trust outsiders with their home and business projects often called Mr. Jenkins for help. When Robbie was just a teenager, his dad, Robert Sr., or Bob, told him that someday he would be responsible for caring for his community. Now that the elder Bob of the famous "Jenkins Construction," was slowing down, it was time for Robbie to take over.

"Son, remember that this family business is an institution in this community. For six blocks in every direction, most of these homes and businesses have something in them that my hands built or installed. It's a big responsibility, but I know I raised you to represent the Chapman name well and to care for our community. I believe God has blessed us for so long because we've been committed to this work and have treated people right. Can you handle all that?"

"Dad, you've been telling me this since I was thirteen – I am made for this. You've had me working with you since I was old enough to hold a hammer. I'm ready to care for the community – just like you did." Robert Sr. smiled; he knew his community and legacy would be in good hands, the hands of his son, whom he had raised for this responsibility.

*What is our responsibility as creations made in God's image and likeness?*



### Keep in Mind

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:27, KJV).

## Focal Verses

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**KJV** **Genesis 1:26** 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.

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.

2:4 These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens,

5 And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground.

6 But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.

7 And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

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## The People, Places, and Times

**Adam.** In Genesis, God created man and woman in His image, separating them from the animals, to rule the earth. Yahweh (God) formed Adam from the earth, set him over the Garden of Eden, and allowed him to have dominion over everything God created.

## Background

These verses display two complementary accounts of the creation of humankind. Scholars debate whether the two accounts are a combination of multiple accounts or authors, but such speculation obscures the text's purpose and the questions that it seeks to answer. To view these verses as a compilation rather than a unified work is to give too much credence to a hypothetical situation. Humankind was created

in God's image and likeness, a dignity corrupted but not eradicated by the Fall. The panoramic view of Genesis 1 comes to a sharp focus on the first human couple beginning in Genesis 2:4, lingering on God's meticulous shaping of His beloved vice-regents.

Here we see two complementary, not contradictory images of God. Genesis 1:1–2:3 reveals God to be transcendent, exerting His power and influence over the breadth of creation. Genesis 2:4 reveals God to be the immanent "God with us", who cares deeply about even the small details of human life. These twin descriptions point forward to the incarnate Jesus Christ, who in His human life also exhibited the power and influence worthy of His transcendent divinity. The same one born from the humanity of Mary

controlled the weather, healed disease, and cast out demons. One must not view God's transcendence and immanence as contradictory but as necessarily entwined. It is only as both transcendent and immanent that God both cares deeply about our problems and has the power to overcome them.

## At-A-Glance

1. Humanity: Vice-Regents Over Creation (Genesis 1:26–31)

2. Humanity: Living Dirt (Genesis 2:4–7)

## In Depth

### 1. Humanity: Vice-Regents Over Creation (Genesis 1:26–31)

Here, God gives men and women dominion over the rest of creation. This is one of the meanings of the “image” and “likeness” of God in which we have been created. Theologians throughout the centuries have debated whether “image” and “likeness” reveal different aspects of human destiny, but they are two sides of the same coin. The author of Genesis means for us to know that humans were created to be like God. While God as creator is radically different from us creatures, our possession of moral abilities, mind, will, and spiritual desires makes it possible for us to pursue holiness, the core of who God is. The image and likeness of God are also integral components of human nature, meaning no one can reduce or remove that dignity from us. To attempt to do so is to deny the mandates of creation. Instead, we as human beings are commanded to care for one another and to exert loving authority over earthly creation.

God's final declaration of “very good” over His creation reminds us of the original goodness

of humanity along with the rest of creation. This is a picture of complete perfection, harmony, and order, the Hebrew *shalom*. It remains the mandate to humanity to seek this harmony by the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Christ.

*What does this Scripture tell us about our environmental responsibilities?*

### 2. Humanity: Living Dirt (2:4–7)

The second, more focused account of the creation of humanity adds detail to the bird's eye view offered in Genesis 1. We are reminded that we owe every gift of our creation to God. We are also reminded of the humble nature of our material origin: the dirt of the ground. As in our redemption by the Cross, Creation preaches a dual message to humanity: We are creatures of both great dignity and great humility. As Christ died for us and proclaimed our worth, so we also remember our dignity as created in the image of God. But also, as our sin necessitated Christ's death, Genesis reminds us that we are of the earth. The text even engages in wordplay to remind us of the similarity between the words “man” (Heb. *adam*, ah-DOM) and the “ground” (Heb. *adamah*, ah-dom-AH) from which we are formed.

*Are you tempted to think more highly of yourself or more lowly?*

## Search the Scriptures

1. Why do you think the second account of our creation outlines the forming of our bodies before the in-breathing of our soul/spirit?

2. In this creation story, what distinguishes humanity from the beginning?

## Discuss the Meaning

1. What does it mean for us to be made in God's image and likeness?

2. How do we know what we are responsible for in our community and environment?

### **Liberating Lesson**

Western history has attempted to tell people of African descent that they are not bearers of the image of God. From seventeenth- and eighteenth-century attempts to frame African-Americans and whites as different species, to current suggestions that African Americans are dangerous or unintelligent, the powers and principalities that we battle have attempted to deny African Americans the complicated, dignified, and humble humanity that God has bestowed upon all of us indiscriminately. These attempts, however, whether they were as brutal as lynching or as subtle as the mis-education of students, cannot reduce or diminish what God has declared. Integral to the Good News of Jesus Christ is a leveling of humanity: All have sinned, and all are in need of a Savior. Similarly, within the body of Christ, our cultural distinctions are held together in union with Christ and with each other in Christ.

### **Application for Activation**

In your daily life, whether it is work, school, or some other endeavor, make an effort to treat everyone you meet with the dignity that they deserve. As you make personal or even political decisions, remember that you do so not only for your own good but for the good of the diverse body of Christ. Consider how you can pray that God's glory would be

exhibited through the many human vessels around you, including yourself. Interrogate your own assumptions about groups of people: If you think that some groups of people are less intelligent than others, less susceptible to the Gospel than others, or inferior in any other way, you are implicitly denying them the dignity of the image of God. Instead, look to the second greatest commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself.

### **Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do:

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### **Remember Your Thoughts**

Special insights I have learned:

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### Say It Correctly

Dominion. doe-MIN-yuhn.

### Daily Bible Readings

**DAY 1**

Genesis 1-3

Psalm 1

**DAY 2**

Genesis 4-7

Psalm 2:1-6

**DAY 3**

Genesis 8-11

Psalm 2:7-12

**DAY 4**

Genesis 12-15

Psalm 3:1-6

**DAY 5**

Genesis 16-18

Psalm 3:7-8

**DAY 6**

Genesis 19-21

Psalm 4:1-5

**DAY 7**

Genesis 22-24

Psalm 4:6-8

## Notes

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