



Discussion Guide

Creation: Genesis 1.26-31

Getting Started: 10 minutes

- o Describe what “the good life” would be for you. Can you elaborate?
- o Optional: What, if anything from the sermon, encouraged, challenged, or really made you think?

Setting the Stage: *God made the world. God designed life, designed it to be a certain way. The life He designed was good, really good; life filled with worth, wholeness and purpose, a wholeness and purpose lived out in intimate and free relationships with both God and others. Deep down we know this is what life was meant to be. We hunger, we thirst, we chase after the good life, the God-intended good life. The question is, can we ever find it?*

Diving Into the Text: 60 minutes (The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Read Genesis 1.26-31. (*You might consider reading Genesis 1.1-2.3 as a group for context.*)
- In Genesis 1-2, one finds an account of God’s creative activity. The pinnacle of God’s creative work is seen in His movement to create people (Genesis 1.26-31). Considering this text, what purposes did God have for creating people? (*Tip: Look down through the text to draw out all the possible ideas.*)
- What parameters for human life did God institute in creation? (*You might consider what it means to be created in the image of God as you think about this.*)
- In what ways might life as God created it truly be described as good? (Genesis 1.31)
- How might this God-intended good life look in the present?
- Do you see people innately hungering and searching for God’s good life? In what ways do you see this?
- Do you see this innate hungering and searching in yourself? Can you elaborate?
- What is it, if anything, that draws you to the good life described in Genesis?
- Are there areas of your life where you might be settling for something less than God’s good life? Can you elaborate?
- If this God-intended good life were available to you now, what would you be willing to give for it? Would you be willing to turn to God for it? Can you explain?

Wrapping Up: 20 minutes

- o Prayer requests
- o Group Prayer time
- o House-keeping matters (assignments for the next meeting)



Group Notes

Creation: Discussion Guide

Genesis 1.26-31

Context and Background

Creation account: The opening chapters of Genesis provide an account of how all that exists came into being. Since the period of the Enlightenment, there has been a growing debate over the meaning and veracity of these accounts, particularly in respect to what seem to be glaring differences between the biblical and modern-scientific accounts of creation. We do not have the space to recap all of these debates. However, let us consider the following truth. The purposes of Genesis and science are not incompatible but neither are they the same. The author of Genesis writes in a prescriptive manner, that is, he writes to explain the “who” and “why” that lie behind creation. Science, on the other hand, is much more descriptive, explaining the “how” of creation. Further, the author of Genesis has more of a theological agenda. He wants to create a literary representation that fortifies God’s covenant with creation. He simply does not ask the questions a modern scientist would ask. When we understand these differences, we can wrestle with the tensions between the scientific and biblical accounts in a way that does not threaten the foundations of our faith.

The creation accounts—there are two—in Genesis exist both to underscore that God created and the special role people have in His creation. Both accounts (Genesis 1.1-2.3 and 2.4-25) stress God’s role in creating, and this by spoken word. What is not clear are the processes that God spoke into being that brought life into existence. These are mystery, something that only God knows, a truth perhaps supported by the author’s use of two creation accounts. He seems to be struggling to put into words what God did. It is beyond human comprehension. Second, both accounts indicate that humans have a special role in God’s creation because they alone bear God’s image. This image grants people a special relationship with God. This truth concerning people’s special relationship with God is perhaps the central thought that drives the rest of the biblical narrative forward to its completion.

The image of God: The image of God is what separates people from the rest of God’s creation. Entire volumes have been written about what this image entails. Needless to say, much still remains mystery. Some insight can be gleaned from Ancient Near-Eastern (ANE) thought, the cultural context of Genesis. In ANE thought, the image of something carried the essence of that which it represented, though not necessarily in physical form. Thus, an idol was thought to bear the image of a god, to have part of its true essence even though it might not look physically like the god. It is perhaps in this sense that the phrase “image of God” is used in Genesis. People, in some way, bear the divine essence, though not necessarily God’s physical form as God has no physical form but is spirit (John 4.24). In this sense, God created people as His image bearers to be spiritual beings with their physical bodies serving a theomorphic function. That is, our physical bodies speak to God’s essence, not his physical demeanor. For instance, we have ears to show that God hears our prayers, and we smile and laugh to show that God too laughs. While these ideas can be drawn from the ancient understanding of “image of God,” we can draw more from the text of Genesis itself. God states that the purpose of marking people with His image is to enable them to exercise dominion over creation (Gen. 1.26, 28). Thus, part of the image of God, is the ability to, like God, exercise creative dominion. Though, such dominion is meant to be exercised in communion with, rather than separation from God as we bear the essence of God and are not God Himself. Finally, we see that in some sense, the image of God instills in people the need for intimate connection and community in both horizontal and vertical relationships. When God indicates that His plan is to create people in His image, He speaks in the plural. While it is unclear the exact meaning of this phrase (Gen. 1.26), what is clear is that it indicates a need for community as God creates people as male and female, sexual beings designed for connection and community in both the physical and emotional realms. While the full extent of God’s image is somewhat nebulous, the implications of carrying God’s image are crystal clear. As God’s image-bearers, all people are eternal spiritual beings of infinite worth. Further, life consists of more than the body or service to the body. Rather, true life is found in intimate connections with others and God that bring about the freedom to express oneself creatively in creation in such a way that extends God’s care to people and the rest of His creation.

The Text

God’s creative plan (Genesis 1.26): Having created all of the natural world, God comes to the pinnacle of creation, people. Rather than speaking people into existence, an existence in which people are simply like their own kind (See Gen. 1.21, 24, 25), God pauses and reflects on what He is about to do. He is about to make people, but He will separate them from the rest of creation by making them in His image (See *The image of God*). Thus, people stand apart, having a life that is a part of creation but at the same time stands apart, having a special relationship with God Himself.

God’s creative action (Genesis 1.27-31): God moved to create people in His image. We see that He created them sexual beings, intended for connection with one another both physically and emotionally, and in the context of this relationship to connect with God and His creation. We see this connection with God in God’s special blessing falling upon people (Gen. 1.28). People have a special relationship with God, a relationship in which God speaks directly to them, giving them instruction for their life. They are to go and multiply so that people can fill creation, extending His care to it. In the context of this special relationship, people receive God’s gracious provision. They are given all they need and are protected from those aspects of creation that might harm them as the creation itself is provided for by God (Gen. 1.29-30). In this state, people experienced a good life, something that was as God intended it (Gen. 1.31), a beautiful and complex life full of relationships marked by intimacy, love, and joy, as well as purpose and meaning for life coupled with the provision necessary to carry out that purpose in an effective way.

Application: God made everything. Life itself comes from God, life as it was meant to be. This life, originally, was one marked by goodness, a wholeness in creation. In God’s creation, people filled, and still fill, a wonderful role. People are eternal spiritual-beings of immense worth, created to live lives of purpose and meaning in intimate connection with God and one another. As bearers of God’s image, people stand as God’s representatives on earth, those who both receive God’s life and share it in gracious care with God’s creation. This image marks people as creatures who exist in the body but have an essence that makes life more than about the body. Rather true life is found only in connection with God and others that gives purpose and meaning to all that one does and is.