

***BEGINNINGS: Lesson Two***  
***Creation: The Beginning of Human History***  
***Genesis 1:26 – 2:3***

**Subject:** The man, created in God's image, enjoyed God's blessing and rest.  
**Main Idea:** God created mankind as He intended us to be.

**Principles:**

1. *One day, God will fully restore the excellence of our humanity.*
2. *God has blessed us with the ability to continue His creative work.*
3. *When we learn to live by faith, we are satisfied and at rest.*

### Introduction

Do you sometimes struggle with the nagging sense that you don't quite measure up? Have you recently wondered if you're reaching your potential? It's a thought that haunts some people, causing us to drive ourselves to the point of exhaustion or to give up in despair. A related question is, "What is the purpose of my life?"

In this week's lesson, our passage gives us a glimpse of mankind at our best – truly capable of reaching our potential – exactly as God intends us to ultimately be.

We know that things aren't that way now. The entrance of sin into the world in Genesis 3 is exactly why we struggle with insecurity about our purpose and identity. According to the New Testament passages you looked up, God's ultimate purpose is to restore us to what He intended us to be (Acts 3:21).

Of course, this leaves us curious about just how things were before the Fall, since that is our future. But the more immediately relevant question is whether we can become what God intended us to be *now*, and if so, how do we go about it? What does our Genesis passage reveal about the standard against which we should be measuring ourselves? How, in this life, can we reach our potential?

Our passage points out three aspects of our Creator's design for us. The first is that we were made to be His image-bearers. That is man's intended relationship to his Creator.

## I. ESTABLISHED IN GOD’S IMAGE – Genesis 1:26-27

**A. Man’s Unique Creation:** The words used to describe man’s creation reflect a change from the pattern we have seen with all other created things. They are much more personal. “Let there be” is replaced with “let us make,” and while plant life and living creatures were made “according to their own kind,” the emphasis with man is his creation “in God’s image.”

### B. “Let us... in our” – 1:26a

- i. To Whom Was God Speaking? To whom was God speaking when He said, “Let us make mankind in our image”? Do the words “us” and “our” suggest some kind of plurality in God? If not, is God talking to someone else present at Creation?
  1. Some suggest God is speaking to the angels<sup>i</sup> when He says, “Let us make...” Others suggest the language is simply that of self-deliberation and contains no implication of plurality within the speaker.<sup>ii</sup> However, church fathers and Reformers historically taught this as a reference to a plurality within the Godhead, that God is both singular and plural, without further explanation.<sup>iii, iv</sup>
- ii. The Triune God
  1. The Trinity is the doctrine of the unity of God as subsisting in three distinct Persons: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. There are not three gods, but three personas of the one and only God. How this could be is beyond human understanding; it is a divine mystery.
  2. To err by emphasizing the distinct persons of the Trinity so that we view them as three separate gods is called “tritheism.” To err in the opposite direction by emphasizing the role or person of God the Father so that Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are secondary to Him is called “unitarianism.”
  3. Although the doctrine of the Trinity is developed out of the teachings of Scripture, the word “trinity” does not actually appear in the Bible. While one cannot use the first chapters of Genesis to develop the doctrine of the Trinity, there certainly seems to be an indication of it.

### C. Made in God’s Image – 1:26-27

- i. What Does it Mean? What does it mean to be made in God’s image?
  1. *Fellowship:* Inherent in the phrase, “Let us make man in our own image” is that a relational being was creating a relational creature.

2. *Rulership*: Secondly, God is the sovereign Ruler of the universe. God said He made man in His own image “*so that they may rule...*” (my emphasis). We bear His image as rulers. As rulers over the earth, we also bear responsibility for its care and wellbeing. We were made in God’s image so that we would represent Him on the earth.
3. *Plurality*: Third, the passage says, “In the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.” Our plurality reflects His.
4. *Other Meanings*: No further explanations are given in Genesis 1 about the ways in which mankind was made to reflect God’s image. However, a few others can be deduced from a general knowledge of the Scriptures:
  - a. *Spirit*: God is Spirit (John 4:24). Therefore, our resemblance to Him is not physical, yet our physical bodies give us the ability to do things that God can do without a physical body: to see, to hear, and to speak, for example. We are also spiritual beings. Of all God’s creation, man alone has the capacity for fellowship with His Creator.
  - b. *Personality*: We, like God, have intellect, emotions and free will. We could say that like God, we have personality.
  - c. *Moral Beings*: God is the standard of morality and He created us moral beings, with a conscience (Romans 2:15).
5. Ultimately, rather than attempting to explain the image of God in us by categorizing the ways we are like Him, it may be best to understand “in God’s image, in His likeness” for exactly what it says: we were created to be God-like.
- ii. Summary: As we consider the wonder and glory of the heavens, the seas and their creatures, and all creation, it is an amazing thought that none of these are as much like God as we are. Though some animals show a kind of emotion, the ability to reason, and certain other God-like qualities, only man is so much like God that God declared us to be in His image. This thought ought to leave us with a sense of dignity and significance, because our value lies in that we are made to be like God.<sup>v</sup> We are the pinnacle of His creation.

**D. The Original Nobility of Mankind:** A fundamental teaching of Genesis is the original nobility of man. Man was created with an exalted nature. Our restoration to that position begins the moment we are re-created in Christ.

- i. Mankind before “The Fall”: It is difficult to imagine exactly what the first man was like because of our present fallen condition. We can only assume, because of his pure and innocent state with regard to sin, Adam would have that seen God more clearly. Scientists claim that humans currently use only a small percentage of our brains; Adam’s brain would not have been so limited. Imagine his capacity for knowing God and to learn and to retain knowledge! His mind would not have been cluttered with distractions. Because there was no sin in the world, Adam wouldn’t have had any errors in his knowledge. Because his body was not death-sentenced, he would never have had the many limitations we do – a poor night’s sleep, an injury to slow us down, or an illness. All his appetites were noble and helpful, never destructive. Imagine a life so free to fully enjoy and indulge only in what is good!
- ii. Impact of Sin: Since that time, sin has brought death to our bodies, offset the magnet of our moral compass, challenged our emotions and intellect, and worst of all, destroyed our fellowship with God. Though we are a shadow of what we once were, all human beings are still stamped with the image of God.
- iii. Restoration: Restoration is God’s ultimate purpose for His creation (Acts 3:21). This includes the full restoration of creation from the impact of the Curse (Romans 8) and the return of God’s children to our original nobility, which will enable us to physically dwell in His presence (as Adam did in Eden) where we will rule with Him forever (Revelation 22). In Christ, we are restored to the noble position that Adam and Eve enjoyed before the Fall. In this life, Christians receive a deposit toward the full inheritance of our restored position, which will only be completely ours in Heaven.
- iv. The Son of God: Where can we look to find an example of one who bears the unmarred image of God? Though the Scriptures only give us a glimpse of the first man before the Fall, they indulge us with a beautiful portrait of the life of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, God in the flesh! When we examine His life, we see the noble character God created us to have. This is why it is God’s purpose that Christians be “conformed to the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29). When Christ returns, “we will be like Him” (1 John 3:2).

**Summary Statement:** In his excellent *Systematic Theology*, Wayne Grudem summarizes:

*Though man is still in the image of God, in every aspect of life some parts of that image have been distorted or lost... The full measure of the excellence of our humanity will not be seen again in life on earth until Christ returns and we have obtained all the benefits of the salvation he earned for us.*<sup>vi</sup>

**Principle:** *One day, God will fully restore the excellence of our humanity.*

This is a day for each of us to look forward to! But isn't there a way in which Christ's followers can better reflect His image daily while on earth? Yes, there is! We can live each day of our lives filled with the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of God, also called the Spirit of Jesus. The more we are filled with Him, the better we reflect God's image.

A person receives the Holy Spirit when they receive Christ as Savior and exchange self-governance for Christ's rule over them. The Holy Spirit indwells all Christians (Romans 8:9). Since the Holy Spirit is a person, we cannot have *some* of Him. A person who is a Christian has *all* of Him. But we are not all *filled* with Him. While receiving Christ as Savior is a once-for-all-time decision, our flesh continues to battle against the concept of His Lordship, that is, His governance over us. The question of filling isn't a question of how much of Him we have, but of how much of us we have surrendered to Him! God is not interested in only having some part of us, some part that we have thought of as the "spiritual part." God made us in His image, and He views every part of us as a "spiritual part."

The problem Christians face once they relinquish all areas of their life to God is gradually reclaiming control over certain areas of our own lives. We do not lose our salvation. We do not lose the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit is no longer filling us, since we are no longer offering parts of our lives in submission to His authority. This explains why many believers who experience much joy and new power in their lives at their conversion find they are not continuing to live in this experience.

Because of sin, we no longer reflect God's image as Adam did. One day in the future, we will be fully restored to that noble state. But for now, those who are filled with God's Spirit represent Him best. Would you allow me to suggest some practical steps that enable us to continually be restored to the experience of Spirit-filled living?

Ephesians 5:18 commands Christians to "be filled with the Holy Spirit," implying action on our parts. How can we be restored to Spirit-filled living?

1. The first practical step is the confession of all known sin. Choosing to deal with sin in our lives is an essential to Christian living. We must trust God to reveal sin and deal with those He has revealed to us. In His time, He will expose sin within us more and more. But we are only responsible each day to deal with sin that He has revealed. When we sin, we grieve the Holy Spirit. Therefore, our sins must not only be confessed, they must be put to death. We must pray for deliverance from the power of sin over our lives. It is helpful to pray in advance regarding the very next time you are tempted in the specific, known area of struggle. Be specific in confessing sin to God. Name it for what it really is. We have not truly asked for forgiveness unless our pride is touched.

2. Secondly, we must consciously re-surrender ourselves to God. At times it may be necessary to renew this commitment daily. It is the decision that we will not take back and attempt to govern this area of our life again on our own. We are giving Him access once again to all parts of our being. Make this commitment to the Lord and then *ask Him* to fill you with His Spirit.
3. After we have dealt thoroughly with sin and surrendered ourselves to Him, we must “put on” Christ-likeness. This means choosing to behave in the way that is the exact opposite of the sin we have confessed. If you have been talking foolishly, choose self-control in your speech. If you have harbored hatred in your heart, choose to think about this person in loving ways and act in loving ways toward them. You may not feel as though you are loving or self-controlled, but if you trust by faith that God will work these things in you and act as though they are yours, you will find God faithful to transform you.
4. The final step is expecting God to fill you with His Spirit. You may immediately sense a change within you or you may see this occur gradually, but Jesus promised believers would have His Spirit. So we must believe, by faith, that He is willing to fill us when we allow Him to do so. You will begin to see the fruit of the Spirit in your life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Spirit-filled believers are actively depending on Him, moment by moment. By pressing into dependence on God, we find release from fears, restlessness, and stresses.

**Application:** To know we are made in God’s image helps us understand what we were made to be. We were created to be God-like. If you have received Jesus as your Savior by faith, when will you begin making the Spirit-filled life part of your daily experience? Though we will not be fully restored in this life to reflect God’s image, we can be increasingly Christ-like as we learn to live the Spirit-filled life. The Spirit-filled you and me is us at our best!

**Transition:** God intended that human beings reflect His image. He also intended that we would flourish under His blessing.

## II. FLOURISHING UNDER GOD’S BLESSING - Genesis 1:28-31

**A. Blessed with Fertility:** God blesses us when He bestows a gift upon us – either a temporal or a spiritual gift. In the Old Testament, a major function of blessing was to confer abundant and effective life upon something or someone. One commentary defines God’s blessing as enrichment and fertility.<sup>vii</sup> Another describes the blessing as primarily posterity.<sup>viii</sup> The text supports these ideas: When God blessed them He said, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth...’ ”

## B. Blessed with Provisions

- i. Seed-Bearing Plants and Seeded Fruit: God also blessed Adam with some temporal provisions. One of these was food. He gave the man seed-bearing plants and fruit with seeds in them. All green plants were for all other living creatures.
- ii. Was God's Original Diet for Man Vegetarian? There is not a consensus among Bible scholars that man's original diet was vegetarian. While no mention is made of eating animals in this passage, neither does this passage forbid it. It is possible that man viewed the killing and eating of meat as part of his dominion over the animals from the beginning.<sup>ix</sup> However, Genesis 9:3 seems to indicate that meat was added to man's diet after the Flood. The main emphasis in Genesis 1 regarding food is simply that God provided it for the man.

## C. Blessed with Authority

- i. Rulership: God also blessed the man with a meaningful role on the earth. Following God's blessing, mention of *ruling over* the fish, sky and land creatures is made for a second time. This rulership gave man both privilege and responsibility.
- ii. Subdue the earth? What was God commanding when He told the man to subdue the earth? Reyburn and Fry explain:

*Subdue and have dominion over are parallel expressions with reference to the plants and animals that God has put on the earth. This is not a command to go to war, but for the first people and their offspring to "take control, be in charge, have direction over."*<sup>x</sup>

**D. Blessed by God's Approval:** Finally, in verse 31, we read that God declared *all* He made "very good." All was ideal in their original, God-created form. There was no corruption, no sin, and no imperfection. God's creation brought Him delight and satisfaction and joy. God's blessing results from His goodness, but it also reflects His pleasure in His creation. The man was among those God called "very good." He was blessed with God's approval.

**Summary Statement:** When God blessed Adam at Creation, He conferred His approval on him and provided him with food and a meaningful role, but fertility was the primary emphasis of God's blessing. Adam was given the ability to be fruitful and to multiply.

The last command Jesus gave His disciples was to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). The parallel is apparent. Above all other creative activities, God has called us to be *spiritually* fertile. We are blessed with the opportunity to participate in His re-creation process by leading people to the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Jesus told His disciples,

*I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener... No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing (John 15:1-5).*

Just as God made Adam physically fertile, He makes Christians spiritually fertile.

**Principle:** *God has blessed us with the ability to continue His creative work.*

**Application:** When did you last experience the blessing of participating in such a re-creation? While we are not responsible for changing another person's attitude toward God (only God can change a person's heart), we have been charged with leading people to Him. From Genesis 1, we learn that God intended from the beginning to bless us with fruitfulness. He wants us to flourish spiritually under His blessing. We are at our best when we are reproducing spiritually!

**Transition:** Not only did God create us to increasingly reflect His image and flourish under His blessing, He also created us to find satisfaction in His rest.

### III. SATISFIED BY GOD'S REST – Genesis 2:1-3

**A. The Vast Array was Completed – 2:1:** Genesis 2 begins, “Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.” The “vast array” (“all the host”) included the full range of life on Planet Earth, as well as heavenly bodies. Pondering the details of God's handiwork is humbling, and at the same time, it renews our sense of dignity and worth.

#### B. God Rested and Set Apart the Seventh Day – 2:2-3

- i. Rest from His Work in Creation: By the seventh day, God had finished His work and He rested. This was not because He was tired, but because His work was complete. There is the true sense in which God never rests, for we know He does not rest from “holding all things together” or “sustaining them” (Colossians 1:17 and Hebrews 1:3). Therefore, resting on the seventh day does not indicate a cessation of *all* work, simply of the work of creation.
- ii. A Greater Spiritual Significance: When one has studied the entire Bible, it becomes clear that God rested to set a precedent for us and to proclaim a profound spiritual principle.
  1. *Physical Rest:* The fourth of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) says:

*Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but He rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*

Unlike God, our bodies need rest, and the Sabbath was intended to help meet this need. The Jews later detailed specific Sabbath rules, effectively turning the blessing into a burden. Jesus chastened them, saying that their imposed limitations were not what God had in mind. God intended the Sabbath as a gift, not a burden (Matthew 12:1-14).

2. *Spiritual Rest*: Unlike the first six “days” of creation, the seventh day does not follow the typical pattern, which ends “and there was evening and there was morning.” Perhaps the phrase was omitted because the true Sabbath rest God offers is eternal.
  - a. *An Initial Decision to Rest*: Long after God completed His creation work, there came a day when His Son Jesus finished His work on earth. He fulfilled every requirement necessary to restore fallen humanity and declared from the cross, “It is finished” (John 19:30). Saving faith involves acknowledging that we cannot add anything to what God has already done in accomplishing our salvation. It is *resting* in His assurance that Christ has done it all!
  - b. *An Ongoing Choice to Rest*
    - i. Colossians 2:6 says, “Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him.” Personal salvation is more than a one-time deliverance by faith in Christ from the penalty of sin. It also involves progressive deliverance from the power of sin as we live our daily lives by faith.
    - ii. Weekly Sabbath rest is but a shadow of the great, spiritual principle that the Christian life cannot be lived by self-effort but by daily entering God’s rest. One of the ongoing battlegrounds of sin in the life of almost every Christian is the sin of self-reliance. We believe we should and must accomplish something meaningful. Paul exhorted the Colossians to live their Christian lives *in the same way* that they received Him. What is that

way? The writer of the Hebrews calls it, “entering God’s rest” (Hebrews 4:10). Just as we can never save ourselves and must stop trying to do so in order to become Christians, we cannot live the Christian life on our own effort. Self-reliance is the opposite of the Sabbath rest God exhorts us to enter (Hebrews 4:11). Instead, we live by faith. This does not mean absence of work but absence of self-reliance. It means casting ourselves on Christ’s adequacy for every task before us.

- c. What is the implication of this important spiritual principle for our seven-day pattern of work followed by rest? First and foremost, the weekly Sabbath day is an opportunity for believers to celebrate Jesus’ finished work on our behalf. It is also an opportunity for each believer to renew his or her commitment to rest in (trust) God with regard to all present circumstances. Finally, it is a day for believers to renew their focus on the glorious future God has promised in which we will be completely and permanently restored to all that He made us to be.

**Principle:** *When we learn to live by faith, we are satisfied and at rest.*

Jesus offers, “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Nothing satisfies like the rest of unloading self-determination and deciding, by faith, to rest in God’s sufficiency. “Rest! Wonderful rest! Relief, release, no longer worrying, fretting, straining, for you are resting upon One who is wholly adequate to do through you everything that needs to be done.”<sup>xi</sup> This is the full meaning of the Sabbath – to rest in God at all times and for all things. In light of this understanding, are you well rested? Will you and I accept Jesus’ invitation to release our burdens to Him this week?

## Conclusion

We started with the question of what God intended us to be and whether, in our currently fallen state, we can experience a measure of that potential. Although we won’t be *fully* restored to that flawless state this side of heaven, every person still reflects God’s image in certain ways. Believers are increasingly of what we were made to be...

- when we are filled with God’s Spirit, for we were made to be God’s image-bearers,
- when we participate in bringing others to Christ, for we were made to be spiritually fertile,
- and when we trust Christ to live His life through us, for He intended that we enter His rest.

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- <sup>i</sup> Carson, D. A. (1994). *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*. (Ge 1:24–31). Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press.
- <sup>ii</sup> Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. (1997). *A Handbook on Genesis*, 50. New York: United Bible Societies.
- <sup>iii</sup> Mathews, K. A. (2001). Genesis 1-11:26. *The New American Commentary*, Vol. 1A, 162. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers. Retrieved from Logos Library Systems.
- <sup>iv</sup> Paschall, F. H., & Hobbs, H. H. (1972). *The Teacher's Bible Commentary: A Concise, Thorough Interpretation of the Entire Bible Designed Especially for Sunday School Teachers*, 13. Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.
- <sup>v</sup> Grudem, Wayne. (2000). *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 442-450. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press.
- <sup>vi</sup> Grudem, Wayne. (2000). *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 444-445. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press.
- <sup>vii</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (2000). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Ge 1:24-31). Wheaton: Victor Books.
- <sup>viii</sup> Barker, Kenneth L., & Kohlenberger, John R. III. (1994). *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Abridged Edition, Old Testament*, 6. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- <sup>ix</sup> Spence-Jones, H.D.M., Ed. (1909). *The Pulpit Commentary: Genesis*, 31. London: Funk & Wagnalls Company.
- <sup>x</sup> Reyburn, W. D. & Fry, E. M. (1998). *A Handbook on Genesis*, 52. New York: United Bible Societies.
- <sup>xi</sup> Stedman, Ray. (1982). *What More Can God Say: A Bible Commentary for Laymen on Hebrews*, 53. Ventura: Regal Books.