

# Chapter 1

## Created for Community

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### SABBATH

Introduction (Genesis 1:1-2, 27)

One of the most foundational propositions of Christian faith is that, “We know God ultimately only as God comes to us—only as he gives himself to be known— only as God reveals himself to us.”<sup>1</sup> God reveals Himself to us in the creation narrative found in the opening chapters of Genesis: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (Genesis 1:1-2).<sup>2</sup> “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27).

The title of Creator provides an insight into God’s nature. It is in the act of creation that we are first introduced to Him in Scripture. Because the very act of creation itself begins in the mind of the Creator, it provides us with a look into the mind of God.

The creation of humanity was the crowning

*Genesis 1:1-2, 27;*  
*Psalm 8:4;*  
*Genesis 1:26-27;*  
*Deuteronomy 6:4;*  
*Mark 12:29;*  
*Genesis 1:28;*  
*Leviticus 26:12;*  
*John 17:20-21*

<sup>1</sup>Stanley Grenz and J. T. Smith, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2015) Kindle Edition, 11.

<sup>2</sup>This text and all other quotations in this chapter are taken from the *New International Version* of the Bible.

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act of God's creation. Through the act of creating humanity in His own image God revealed His own nature and character, but He also enabled human beings to understand themselves and the ways they should express their humanity. "Acknowledging that God is our origin also has implications for the human nature we share in common with each other. Above all, it means that we realize that God alone has the prerogative to declare what it means to be human."<sup>3</sup> Consequently, as we reflect on the creation story, it is safe to conclude that humankind was created in and for community, because God lives in community.

In this chapter we will examine some of the implications of human beings having been created in the image of God, including why we as humans have such a great need for community and the insights that such a need provides in gaining a better understanding of God, others, and ourselves.

**What do you think of the proposition that we cannot know who we really are apart from the revelation from God?**

## **SUNDAY**

### **Created in God's Image**

(Psalm 8:4)

In Psalms 8:4 David asks the question that many are still asking to this very day: "What is man?" After taking into consideration God's magnificent creation, David couldn't help but wonder why humankind had been given such a prominent role in the overall scheme of things. In other words, what makes human beings so special?

The answer is found in what is probably the most important scripture regarding the nature of humankind. That is Genesis 1:26, where God says, "Let us make mankind in our image." The fact that we have been created in the very image of God gives us status. Created in the image of God, the life of each human being is of inestimable value. The life of the alcoholic staggering down the street, the unemployed young man living in the projects, the prostitute plying her wares in the night's shadow, and the banker that lines his pocket at the expense of the poor are all of great value to God, because they were made in His image. Some argue that to be created in God's image means that God has a physical body in much the same way that we do. This is probably not the case, since God is a spiritual being (John 4:24). But if the image of God in human beings is not to be interpreted as physical likeness, then what is it?

Being created in the image of God most likely means that human beings in a very real sense are like God and represent God, although they are not God. The Hebrew words for "image" and "likeness" refer to something that is similar but not identical to what it represents. Human beings possess many of the attributes that God possesses. Attributes such as moral goodness, love, and the fact that we are relational beings are just a few (Psalms 107:1; Exodus 25:8). So when David asked, "What is man?" it wasn't as if he didn't know the answer, but rather he was probably reflecting on the fact that by shaping within human beings similar characteristics to His own, God was making a statement of how much He valued human beings and of the God-like life He expected from

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<sup>3</sup>Grenz and Smith, 4.

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members of the human family.

Without doubt, one fundamental element of the nature of God is that He lives in community. Some might go as far as to say that God is community, in that He exists in plurality—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Human beings, created in God’s image, must surely reflect the essential plural nature of God.

**God does not value human beings because of wealth, education, or status, but because they were made by Him, in His image. What is the measure that you use to value other human beings?**

## **MONDAY**

### **Community as Human Nature** (Genesis 1:26-27)

The story of creation gives us as human beings profound insight into the very nature of God. For example, God’s nature is revealed in a powerful way in the narrative of the sixth day of creation when He unveils before the entire universe His creature, a human being. God created human being as a plural being—male and female. In creating human beings as plural beings (Genesis 1:26-27), God reveals that, by being created in His image, each human being was made to exist in plurality or in community.

The connection that exists between male and female is a reflection of that which is inherent in the very nature of God. Simply put, humanity exists in community because God exists in community. When God declared that it was “not good” for Adam to be alone, God was saying more than that Adam needed

a wife. Emotional, physical, and psychological drives needed to be satisfied, and that was important. But even more important was that, on his own, Adam did not bear God’s image and thus could not carry out God’s purpose. “God supplied this need for Adam by creating for him a suitable helper (Gen. 2:18), with whom he could do the work God assigned to mankind, multiplying into a family and then a community of image-bearing servants.”<sup>4</sup>

If God exists in community, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, then humanity, in order to reflect God’s image, must also exist in community. In fact, “the emphasis on community as an integral part of God’s design for creation is an important corrective to the individualism that permeates both our society and the church.”<sup>5</sup>

Our desire to experience community as human beings is not a characteristic that we acquired along the way; it is a result of having been created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). It has been implanted in us by our Creator. Another way of stating this truth is that community is essentially part of what it is to be human. As John Donne reminds us, “No man is an island.” To endeavor to live our lives in a social vacuum in which we hear our own voice, where we are challenged by our own thoughts, and pursue our own interests, is to live in contradiction to our nature and to God’s plan for our lives.

**What new insights have you gained from the fact that God created human beings to live in community?**

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<sup>4</sup>Mike Leake, *Created to Relate*, <http://www.lifeway.com/article/sermon-created-relationships-family-church-genesis-ephe-sians>. Accessed October 22, 2017.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

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## TUESDAY

### A Community of Oneness

(Deuteronomy 6:4; Mark 12:29)

God's arithmetic is often quite different from ours. Not only does the Bible portray God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Luke 3:21-22; Matthew 28:19), it is also emphatic that there is one God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Mark 12:29). While God is ultimately beyond human comprehension, He has revealed enough of Himself to aid us in solving the riddle of how God can be three and one at the same time. "Four statements summarize the contents of the trinitarian understanding of God: God is one. God is three. God is a diversity. God is a unity."<sup>6</sup>

The concept of concurrent plurality and oneness is fairly prevalent in the Old Testament. For example, we read in Genesis 1:5, "God called the light 'day,' and the darkness he called 'night.' And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day." Day and night are first stated as two separate time periods, but subsequently are one (Hebrew, *echad*) day. Then, in Genesis 2:24, we are told, "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one (*echad*) flesh."

Jesus did not see a conflict between the Trinity and the oneness of God. The three members of the Godhead were present at His baptism (Luke 3:21-22) and mentioned in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19), but He nevertheless insisted that God is one (Mark 12:29). "Each of the three trinitarian persons fulfills a specific role in the one divine program. The Father functions as the source or ground of the

world and the originator of the divine program for creation. The Son functions as the revealer of God, the exemplar and herald of the Father's will for creation, and the redeemer of humankind. And the Spirit functions as the personal divine power active in the world, completing the divine program. Hence, we can summarize the role of each in the work of the one God in the universe: The Father is the Originator. The Son is the Revealer. The Spirit is the Completer."<sup>7</sup>

Commenting on the process of creating human beings, Gilbert Bilezikian says, "There was one solitary individual, but he had no oneness because there was no one else with whom he could be together in oneness. Since God is Trinity, he is plurality in oneness. Therefore, the creation in his image required the creation of a plurality of persons. God's supreme achievement was not the creation of a solitary man, but the creation of human."<sup>8</sup>

**How is your humanity enriched by the knowledge that you were created to experience life and fulfill God's purpose for you in conjunction with other human beings?**

## WEDNESDAY

### Created to Create Community

(Genesis 1:28)

One of the most exciting times in the life of a husband and wife is when they are about to bring a child into the world. Just the idea of a newborn brings sentiments of joy and excitement into the lives of the expectant couple, often hard to put into words. But what may be overlooked is that the miracle of a

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<sup>6</sup>Grenz and Smith, 18.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid, 18-19.

<sup>8</sup>Gilbert Bilezikian, *Community 101* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 19.

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new life entering the world is an aspect of humankind having been created in the image of God.

The fact that God created humankind in two persons, male and female, was not by accident; it was part of God's plan for the expansion of His creation's community (Genesis 1:28). That God created us to exist in community, and then placed within us the innate ability to reproduce life, serves as a strong message that it was God's intention from the beginning to expand the community beyond His original creation. The generations of the entire earth are direct descendants of our original parents, Adam and Eve. When we keep this perspective in mind, it helps us to see the earth and all of its inhabitants as one very large community.

There are two clear conclusions that can be drawn from the large global community that descended from Adam and Eve. The first is that the Creator making us in His image made us with creative ability and instincts. The birth of each child is evidence of the creative powers that God gave to human beings. The second conclusion is that we need one another. In order for community to work, there needs to be a sense of mutual dependence on the part of those who make up the community. Adam could not create a child on his own; neither could Eve. It took both of them to create a child. We need one another.

"The huge redwood trees . . . are the largest living things on earth and the tallest trees in the world. Some of them are 300 feet high and more than 2,500 years old. You would think that trees that large would have a tremendous root system, reaching down hundreds of feet into the earth. But that is not the

case. Redwoods have a very shallow root system. The roots of these trees are, however, intertwined. They are tied in with each other; interlocked. Thus, when the storms come and the winds blow the redwoods still stand. With an interlocking root system they support and sustain each other. They need one another to survive. So do we!"<sup>9</sup>

**How should the fact that each of us is a part of the worldwide community of God help us to appreciate the communities of which we are a part in our everyday lives?**

## **THURSDAY**

### **Created for Relationship**

(Leviticus 26:12; John 17:20-21)

The most striking part of the entire creation story is bringing humankind into existence. It was not until God created human beings that He declared that His creation was "very good" (Genesis 1:31). We may not know all the reasons why God declared the creation of human beings as "very good" but one reason may be that there is an aspect of creation that reflects His image. Every creative act has a purpose and we can safely infer from Genesis 1:26 that part of the purpose for God creating human beings in His image was to have a relationship with Him. The triune nature of God means that God is a relational being. The members of the Godhead relate to each other and, in turn, God seeks to relate to His creation that bears His image.

By the virtue of creation, we understand that there is a unique relationship between God and

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<sup>9</sup>David Swensen, *Created for Community*, <https://www.sermon-central.com/sermons/created-for-community-david-swensen-sermon-on-church-body-of-christ-40126>. Accessed October 23, 2017.

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humanity that is not replicated with any other part of the creation. The Creator of the universe longs to have a relationship with human beings. Throughout Scripture we see this yearning on the part of God: "I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people" (Leviticus 26:12). And Jesus, when He presented His disciples with the Lord's Prayer, admonished them to approach God in this manner saying, "Our Father in heaven . . ." (Matthew 6:9). God desires to have a relationship with us that is similar to that which exists between the members of the Godhead (John 17:20-21).

God desires relationships because God is love. "Throughout all eternity God is none other than the Father, Son, and Spirit bound together in an eternal dynamic relationship. But what is the bond that unites the Triune God we have come to know? The key to the answer to our query lies in the biblical declaration, 'God is love' (1 John 4:8, 16)."<sup>10</sup> The motive that prompts any action by God is love, which means that the motive for creating humanity was love, and love can only be manifested in relationships.

Mark Dever shows us the path to love: "We demonstrate to the world that we have been changed, not primarily because we memorize Bible verses, pray before meals, tithe a portion of our income, and listen to Christian radio stations, but because we increasingly show a willingness to put up with, to forgive, and even to love a bunch of fellow sinners."<sup>11</sup> That is what the relational God did for us and that is what humans who recognize that they are created in God's image and are creatures of love are expected to do. It's about relationships!

**How does it make you feel to know that the Creator of the universe designed you to relate to Him in a way that exists within no other part of His creation?**

## **FRIDAY** Further Thoughts

"The Christian faith proclaims that we are God's creatures. We belong to the one whom Jesus declared to be our heavenly Father. Because we are the creatures of God, we can know both where we come from and where we are going. In God we find our origin and our destiny. And as we realize we have in God an origin and a destiny, we can begin to understand who we are."<sup>12</sup>

"We do not create ourselves. I am not the source of my own existence, nor are you the author of yours. This seems to be obviously true, for we owe our lives to a host of other people whom we call our parents and ancestors. We are here because God wills that we exist. But there is a deeper sense in which we do not create ourselves. Ultimately, we owe our existence to God, the Creator. We are not in this world simply because our parents decided to have children. More importantly, we are here because God has freely and graciously bestowed existence on us."<sup>13</sup>

"The creation of the world does not merely begin the temporal sequence. More significantly, it stands at the end of the historical process. 'Creation' indicates God's future completion of his work in bringing the universe to its destined state. It is his act in making the world in accordance with the divine

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<sup>10</sup>Grenz and Smith, 20.

<sup>11</sup>Leake

<sup>12</sup>Grenz and Smith, 40.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid, 43.