

The Blessings of Being Human

Genesis 1:26-31

Introduction

Meaning of Life: What is the essence of the human experience? What is the meaning of life? Not just why is **everything** here but why am **I** here? What is my purpose?

- “Care about friends, especially friends who love cookies” (Cookie Monster).
- “Life has no meaning. Each of us has meaning and we bring it to life.” (Joseph Campbell).
- “Spread more smiles than tears” (Tupac).
- “Live and let live.”
- “C’est la vie” (Such is life).

Recap: Genesis 1:1 served as a sort of introduction to the creation account. All that exists comes from God. Genesis 1:2-25 followed God’s generous filling of creation by creating light and separating it from darkness, separating the waters of the atmosphere from the oceans, making land and filling it with vegetation, filling the heavens with the sun, moon, and stars, filling the sky with birds and the water with sea creatures, and then on day six of creation he created land animals... and people (where we pick up today).

Who is God?: Today we’re going to talk a lot about **what it means to be human** but we can’t forget that our understanding of ourselves is intimately bound up to our **understanding of God**. All things come from God. Because God is the creator he sets the measure and purpose of life. He defines what is good and bad.

- **Atheists have a problem.** And many of them know it, because it’s been pointed out by many of the best atheist philosophers — Friedrich **Nietzsche** and Jean Paul **Sartre** (J. D. Greear says these are his favorite atheists because they take their atheism to its logical conclusion).
- Sartre said that the atheists’ problem starts with good news. Once you dispense with God, he says, **the good news** is you can do what you want, guilt free, no dread of retribution. If you get away with it on earth, you get away with it forever. **The bad news** is when you dispense with God you lose all intellectual bases for declaring anything to be inherently right or wrong. You see, in order to say something is “right” or “wrong,” you have to have a standard you are comparing it to (**to say something is against the design you have to know what the design is**) and a random universe can’t have a design or purpose.
- You might argue, practically speaking, that certain things are more “useful” for the human race (based on your vantage point) but that’s different than saying something is “wrong” or “evil.” You may feel that **genocide** is wrong, for example, but why?
 - Just because you think it is more useful to the human race for there not to be genocide? **The Nazis had a different opinion.** You might argue they are wrong in that calculation, but that’s different than saying it’s evil.

- And what is special about the human race anyway? Why should it survive? Why not let survival of the fittest do its work on us?
- You say, “Well, whatever the majority of people think is right should be the law.”
 - Really? Where does that leave the slave living in the American South in the 1840’s when the majority assumes that their oppression is what is most useful for society?
 - Or the Jew in 1930’s Europe? If the Nazis had won and convinced everyone of the superiority of the Arian race, would that have made Jewish oppression right?
- For the atheist, there is no such thing as intrinsic value, just things we have become programmed to believe are useful.
- Let me quote now from my **least** favorite atheist (soundbite atheist), Richard Dawkins: “When you look at certain scenery, you think it is so beautiful because your ancestors believed that there was food out there, and that particular neurological feature that helped them survive has now come down to you; and that’s the reason you see it as ‘beautiful.’” Honestly, just ask yourself: do you buy that? If you do—I mean really do—then I admire you, because that just doesn’t make sense with life. That feeling you have looking out at a sunset or a starry night is just about finding food? “It reminds me of Twinkies!” I don’t even know how that works. No, something in us says that’s absurd. Or that love you feel for your kids or for your spouse—do you honestly believe it is only what Richard Dawkins says—just a conditioned response that our genes have programmed us to make propagate our DNA faster than our neighbors can propagate theirs? Try putting that on a Hallmark card: “My genes have determined you are useful for the propagation of my DNA. Wanna go out?.” Doesn’t have quite the romantic zing to it, does it?
- For the atheist, things cannot be beautiful in themselves; they can only be useful. But Christians believe that things are good and beautiful because they **reflect the image of the creator**.

What Makes Something Valuable?: Some things are valuable because they are scarce (e.g., supply and demand). Some things are valuable because they are popular (e.g., shoes). **Human beings have intrinsic value** (built in, ontological, part of something's being). We see value based on who will pay and what they will pay for it (i.e., God gave his life).

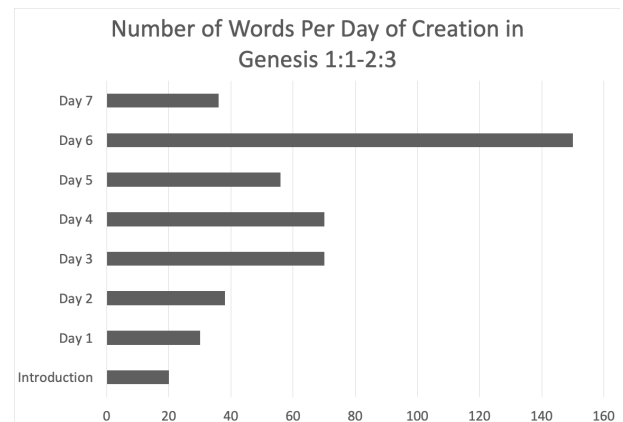
Human beings are uniquely valuable because they bear the image of God and are given the blessing of reflecting God’s glory to all of creation.

²⁶ Then 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 birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” ²⁹ And God said, “Behold, I have given you

every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. ³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

1. Humanity is the pinnacle of God’s creation.

Literary Clues: The competent reader sees some clues in the way the text is structured as to the significance of human beings. If God is the primary character in creation, then human beings are highlighted as his primary creatures. Look at the **number of words** used to describe each day of creation. The description of “day 6” is more than twice as long as any other day. In addition, the description switches from the phrase “let there be” to “let us make.”



- The same word “create” (1:1) is used 3x in 1:27 (So God **created** man in his own image, in the image of God he **created** him; male and female he **created** them).
- Every day of creation has been good in the eyes of God, but God saw everything that he had made [on the 6th day], and behold, it was **very good**
- Human beings are the crown of God’s handiwork. Project “save the best for last”. “Last day, best day” (e.g., bridge comes down the aisle last, bride and groom enter the reception last).

What does this mean?:

- Continuity and discontinuity of humanity and creation. **Human beings are part of creation and above it.**
- Human beings are not the same as animals (not merely animals). We should care for creation, animals, but never value animals more than human beings.
- Human beings are made in the image of God but are still creations, they’re a special part of creation but they are not God.
- This section perfectly highlights humanity while keeping the focus on God.

2. Humanity is made in the image of God.

Magnificence of Humanity:

- “I like living. I have sometimes been wildly, despairingly, acutely miserable, racked with sorrow, but through it all, I still know quite certainly, that just to be alive, is a grand thing. I think this is wonderfully true. To be a living human being is a grand thing” (Agatha Christie).

- “I am alive. Not like a tree or rabbit, but like a human being. I am thinking, feeling, longing, regretting, and grieving. Alive. Made in the very image of God. And this is a grand thing” (J. D. Greear).
- “Be encouraged that simply finding people interesting and caring about them is a beautiful pathway into their heart. Evangelism gets a bad reputation when we are not really interested in people and don’t seem to care about them. People really are interesting. Every person you talk to is an amazing creation of God with a thousand interesting experiences” (Piper).
- “There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal” (C. S. Lewis).

Heaven Didn’t Gain an Angel: I think, because we’re human, we don’t often get the significance of being human (e.g., devaluing of life). Often at funerals I’ll hear well meaning people say something like, “heaven gained an angel.” Human beings are given the opportunity to be co-heirs with God, sons of God. We will *judge* angels in eternity. Don’t demean human beings. We’re better than angels. That person you are talking to at the bus stop is better than an angel. He or she is a created being that will last forever!

Male and Female: ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. “It is a grand thing. And part of the grandeur of being a living human being created in the image of God is that you are either male or female” (Piper).

- Nobody is a generic human being. God creates men and women.
- Men and women are not the same and that is a good thing. This perfect design is seen in God’s plan for the family and the church.
- But men and women are each made in God’s image. Each is valuable. One is not more valuable than the other. Misogynists will seek to abuse God’s good design inside and outside of the church but God, Scripture, and Christian theology elevate women.
 - Aristotle saw women as an inferior and defective version of men.

Image of God: ²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness... ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. *Imago Dei*. Everything is made “according to its kind.” But humanity is made in the “image and likeness of God.” This isn’t the physical likeness of God (God is invisible and humanity is male and female). Most frequently *imago dei* is seen as a spiritual dimension, the capacity for relationship with God, for moral reasoning, that “thing” that separates humanity from animals. No other creature is described in these terms. Humanity is set apart in position, value, and role in God’s creation.

- “The glory of God is man fully alive” (Irenaeus). Maybe a misquote/mistranslation but the point stands. God is most glorified and **we are most fully human** when we are reflecting the image of God.

Christ is the Image of the Invisible God: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and

for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col 1:15-20).

- In Jesus we see the fullest picture of what it means to be human, in the image of God. The way of Jesus is the way to our fullest humanity. The path of Jesus is the path to our most-fulfilled life. The character of Jesus is the beacon against which all other human character compares.

Value: Because every human being is made in the image of God, he or she is valuable. People are not valuable because of their external beauty, accomplishments, or pedigree but because God made them in his image. “The face of a child with down syndrome is equally as beautiful as an airbrushed supermodel on the cover of a fashion magazine” (Mohler). “The soul of the worst criminal is equally as valuable as the most outstanding citizen” (Me). Unborn baby to bedridden elderly, all are valuable.

- “When I cease (or refuse) to recognize [God’s image] in people I don’t like or understand, I cease (or refuse) to recognize God as God” (McRoberts).
- “Take all human beings infinitely seriously.”
- **Black lives matter.** Because every black life is made in the image of God. And when we see that a life is not valued we must speak up and act. Valued. Cherished. Loved. It is sad that segments of the church in America for a long time justified racism and then was silent in the face of oppression. We should be leading the charge.
- We must value every human life from conception to death **regardless**.
- We don’t determine anyone’s value merely by their external circumstances. Jesus allows us to see the intrinsic dignity of each person as an image-bearer of Christ regardless of money, nationality, ability or disability, ethnicity, or any other external factor.

Image Marred: It’s clear that sin marring and distorts the image of God. We don’t reflect God like we should. We don’t walk in his ways but the image of God remains nonetheless. The imprint of God on the human soul persists because he is still our maker and we are still his creation.

- “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image” (Gen 9:6).

3. Humanity is blessed as God’s earthly representatives. ²⁶ And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”... ²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” ²⁹ And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the

earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.

Responsibility: “With great power comes great responsibility” (Uncle Ben in Spider-man). As God’s image-bearers we have the privilege to serve as God’s representatives in creation.

- **Viceregent:** (n) a deputy regent; a person who acts in the place of a ruler, governor, or sovereign (16th century Eng word).
- God has given human beings responsibility of exercising dominion (think stewardship rather than domineering). “Ruling” can be a loving thing (e.g., parenting).
- Being made in the image and likeness of God enables us to fulfill this responsibility.
 - “Command what you will, grant what you command” (Augustine). Whatever God calls us to, he will empower us to accomplish.

Representatives: God’s image is a picture of his residence. He works through us as his ambassadors: “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20).

- Jesus is the perfect image of God. The more we reflect him, the more we display the image of God in creation.

Command vs. Blessing: Be fruitful and multiply God blesses with the command to be fruitful and multiply (God’s commands are blessings). We are called to fill the earth so we can spread the glory of God to all of creation. Is this a command merely to have a bunch of babies (the one command that humans have kept)? This is not a call to some procreational arms race (cf. diminishing the power of the gospel). And human sexuality is not merely a command to be enacted but a blessing to be enjoyed.

- As God fills the land with beauty and creatures, we are called to fill the land. We create as a reflection of God’s creation. That means we create families (duh!) but also all sorts of other things.
- What good is it to fill the world with children if we don’t steward the world into which we bring them?
- We must fill the world with God’s glory and image bearers.

God Filled, We Fill: Fill the earth and subdue it This is the **cultural mandate** the command to spread the glory of God by creating within his creation, by fashioning his creation, by continuing to bring order and dominion to the world he gave us.

- God created humanity with a task (i.e., cultural mandate): dominion, fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue, etc.
- We have a purpose as God’s created image bearers.
- The cultural mandate (i.e., dominion, fill, subdue, etc.) means we are to take what was made and make something of it, create out of his creation.

Purpose: My purpose is to proclaim and display the glory of God through all I do in all the earth (tease that out in the coming weeks).

- How do we obey God and display his glory? Cultivate the fruit of creation as an act of love and worship to the creator. This means that every aspect of our lives is an opportunity to display the glory of God.
- “Jesus’ lordship is as wide as creation. And if his lordship is as wide as creation, then the Christian mission is as wide as creation” (Ashford and Thomas)
 - Our words and behavior are essential to proclaiming and displaying the glory of God, but God is not glorified only by professional missionaries, pastors, or other (traditionally) spiritual enterprises.

What are ways you can proclaim and display the glory of God in your job, relationships, gifts, skills, and hobbies?

- God has designed us to be creative image bearers who use our gifts to display the glory of God. The way we live is an opportunity do what we are designed to do.

Because you are made in the image of God, you’ll never find your place in life until you have found yourself in God.

- Everything is from him—it find its measure and meaning in him.
- Everything is for him—it all exists for his glory.
- You will only be fulfilled to the extent you embrace that

Sin Threatens: Sin threatens our ability to fulfill our purpose. Rather than reflect God, we reflect ourselves. Rather than steward creation, we abuse it for ourselves. Rather than finding fulfillment in God’s good design we set ourselves up as god do “what is right in our own eyes.” Rather than build up we tear down.

- Rather than multiplication we see murder and barrenness.
- But as we will see in Abraham, the promise is still that God will “bless” and “multiply.” His covenant is not thwarted by sin. He promises to save and redeem and restore us to the purposes for which we were created. Infertility (Abram/Sara) rather than fertility
 - “Dear doubting Christian: when Abraham counted the stars, he was counting you” (Burk Parsons).

Conclusion

- Be holy as I am holy. OT and NT.
- Increase and multiply (cf. Pentecost, Acts 6:7). The church fills the earth, helping creating flourish, reflecting the image of God in a broken world.
- Jesus is image of the invisible God. Walk in the path of Jesus. He perfectly displays the glory of God. We are called to fill the earth with the glory of God.
- How can you display and proclaim the glory of God.
- How can you reflect the rule of God.