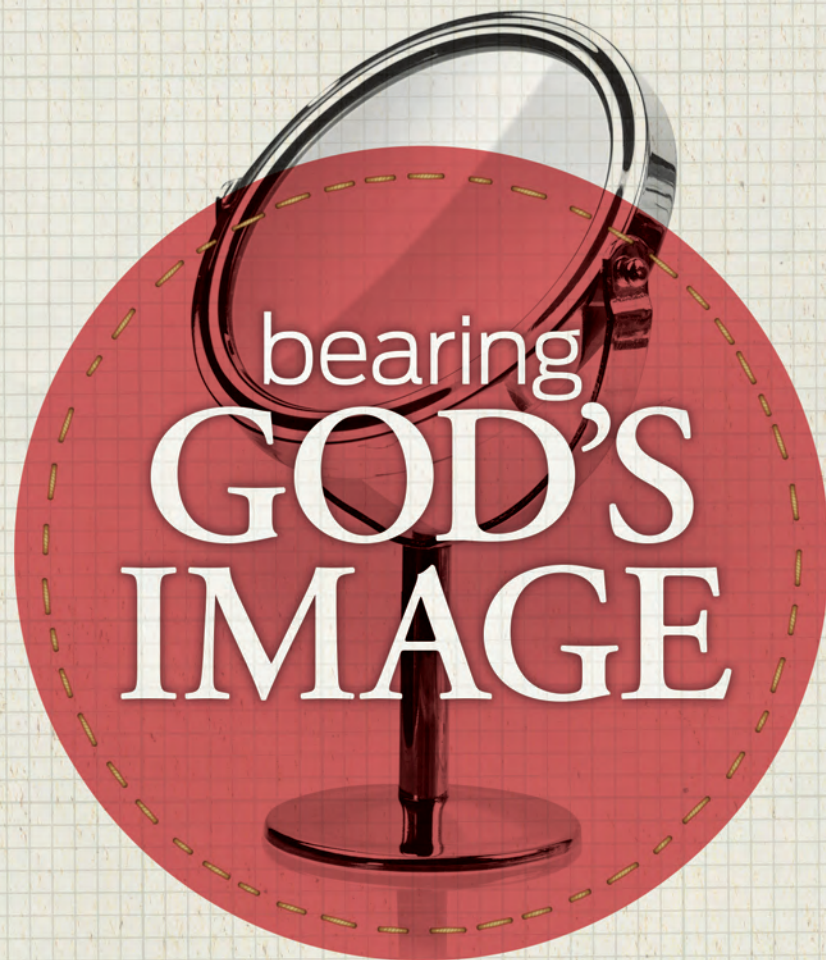


THE
GOSPEL
PROJECT[®]
FOR ADULTS



FALL 2013: *Leader Guide HCSB*

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LifeWay | Adults

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“Why are we here? How can my life have meaning, value, and significance? What is my purpose?” These are questions we all face at one time or another. Explaining what the gospel says to these questions readily demonstrates just how relevant the gospel is to people’s lives.

What happens after death is eternally important, yet the world isn’t always ready to see that. But they are somewhat prepared to consider that because we are made in God’s image, we have infinite value and dignity. Perhaps they can recognize that sin is what robs us of experiencing the reason we have been made—to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. And on the heels of these, perhaps they will see that Jesus alone is our only hope of redemption—that in Him our sins are forgiven, the image of God is restored in us, and by Him we can glorify God and enjoy Him both now and forever.

People are made in the image of God—the *imago Dei*. God made us, Christ died to save us, and God has written His Word for us. That says to me that people are incredibly loved by God their Creator, and we should love people through proclaiming the good news of Jesus who restores us.

Trevin Wax

Managing Editor—*The Gospel Project*
AUTHOR OF MULTIPLE BOOKS, INCLUDING *Counterfeit Gospels*, *Gospel-Centered Teaching*, AND
Clear Winter Nights: A Young Man’s Journey into Truth, Doubt, and What Comes After



“Who are you?” You are valuable and ought to be treated with dignity. But why? Where does this value of human life come from? The Scriptures give us the answer by telling us where we came from and where we are going.

We were created in the image of the all-powerful, all-loving God for His glory and our good—set apart from the rest of creation for His good purposes. But in our sin, we’ve shattered the image of God. Glimpses of His goodness come through, but we are flailing about, unable to fulfill His purposes for us. Yet this story doesn’t end with the image of God shattered but restored. And this restoration comes through the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

In this volume we study the doctrine of humanity. We’ll start off looking at God’s purpose for humanity (reflecting, relating, working, resting, ruling). Then we’ll see how our Savior restores us by paying the price for our disobedience and fulfilling our purpose in our place. Finally, we’ll look at the life of a redeemed human being and how we are slowly shaped into the image of Christ—the One who redeems us, sends us out on mission, and promises to make everything new.

The Gospel Project[®]
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salvation for its end; and truth, without any
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WRITERS

Unit 1: God's Purpose for Humanity

- 7** *Session 1*
Created to Reflect: The Image of God in Humanity
- 19** *Session 2*
Created to Relate: Relating to God, Others, and the World
- 31** *Session 3*
Created to Work: The Doctrine of Vocation
- 43** *Session 4*
Created to Rest: Resting from Work, Resting in Christ
- 55** *Session 5*
Created to Rule: Humanity's Authority in Representing God the King

Unit 2: God's Provision for Humanity

- 67** *Session 6*
Jesus Reflects: Jesus Is the Exact Representation of God
- 79** *Session 7*
Jesus Reconciles: Jesus Restores Communion with God and One Another
- 91** *Session 8*
Jesus Redeems: Jesus' Work on Calvary Brings Salvation
- 103** *Session 9*
Jesus Reigns: Jesus' Reign Fulfills Humanity's Purpose

Unit 3: God's Promise to Humanity

- 115** *Session 10*
Forever Family: Adoption
- 127** *Session 11*
Forever Reflecting: Sanctification
- 139** *Session 12*
Forever Trusting: Perseverance and Assurance
- 151** *Session 13*
Forever Restored: Glorification

Tips from Trevin on how to best use this Leader Guide

Welcome to *The Gospel Project*! Think about the awesome responsibility we have every week—to guide people through Bible study so they have an encounter with the living Christ. I hope *The Gospel Project* will provide you with the tools and resources you need as you prayerfully seek to apply the truth of the gospel to the people God has placed in your group. Here are some things to remember as you use this Leader Guide:

Pray. Pray for your group. Don't lead in your own strength.

Adapt. You know the style of your group. If more discussion-oriented, then encourage participants to read the lesson ahead of time. Use the “For Further Discussion” questions in the Teaching Plan to facilitate discussion that stays grounded in the lesson. If you take a more master-teacher approach, then spend time mastering the Expanded Lesson Content. Select the questions that make the most strategic sense for moving the lesson along.

Cut. If it seems to you that the lessons for *The Gospel Project* provide too much material for one session, you're right. We chose to deliver more than you need and to include the bulk of the lesson in the Personal Study Guide so you don't feel pressed to get all the content delivered in the session time itself. Refer your group members to the Personal Study Guide.

Personalize. Take the truths in *The Gospel Project* and enhance them. Add personal stories. Ask penetrating questions that go to the heart of the people you know and love.

Encourage preparation. The Personal Study Guide includes three devotionals, two that prepare the participant for the group time and one that follows up and reinforces the lesson. Challenge your group to work through the lesson and devotionals each week on their own.

Resource yourself (encourage your group to take advantage of these resources too).

Make use of the additional resources suggested at the end of each lesson.

- Read a suggested chapter or section in a book.
- Learn from the Tip of the Week to grow as a teacher and a group in spiritual maturity.

Visit gospelproject.com/blog for the following:

- Read two additional devotionals related to each week's lesson.
- Listen to a brief video as I point out the highlights to focus on for the upcoming lesson.

Visit gospelproject.com/additionalresources to easily access these resources:

- Read online articles and blog posts related to the lesson content.
- Listen to helpful podcasts from pastors and church leaders.
- Download suggestions for interactive teaching helps to aid in your teaching.
- Download parental resources for talking with children and students about their Gospel Project experiences and joining the family together in discipleship.

Overflow. Remember...*The Gospel Project* is not just a curriculum. WE are the project. The gospel is working on us. Don't prepare simply for the content you're going to deliver. Let the truths of God's Word soak in as you study. A great leader is not a dispenser of information but an overflowing river of gospel passion. Let God work on your heart first, and then pray that He will change the hearts of the people He has entrusted to your care.

SESSION 1

Created to Reflect

The Image of God in Humanity

Summary and Goal

In this session we examine the biblical truth that God created humans in His image with the purpose of glorifying Him and enjoying Him forever. Because we are made in the image of God, we have innate worth and value and are different from the rest of creation. But due to our sin, the image of God in humanity has been shattered, and we fail to fulfill our purpose. Thankfully, God has a plan to restore us through His Son.

Steps to Prepare

1. Read the main passages for this week's lesson, recording your insights and questions:

- Genesis 1:26-28; 9:1-7
- Psalm 16:11
- 1 Corinthians 10:31

2. Study the Expanded Lesson Content (pp. 10-17).

- Determine what elements of this lesson are most applicable to your particular group.
- Consider ways to personalize the lesson content for you and your class.

3. Review the Teaching Plan (pp. 8-9).

- Refine the lesson plan based on your group's particular needs.
- Adjust the plan if necessary.

4. Pray for the Lord's guidance as you lead your group through this material.

Lesson Outline

1. God created us in His image (Gen. 1:26-28).
2. God created us to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever (Ps. 16:11; 1 Cor. 10:31).
3. We have shattered God's image in us and failed at our purpose (Gen. 9:1-7).

Created to Reflect

Session 1

? For Further Discussion

In what ways are humans distinct from the rest of God's world?

? For Further Discussion

What is the difference between reflecting God and representing God?

Introduce the Lesson

Begin by talking about the artistry on display in God's creation. Emphasize the vastness of the universe before you drive home the point that God singled out human beings for a special purpose (leader p. 10; personal study p. 10).

- ? How does the fact of creation—the fact that everything exists because God imagined it and spoke it into being—change the way we see the natural world?

Summarize the lesson—humans are made in God's image and with the purpose of glorifying and enjoying Him forever (leader p. 11; personal study p. 10).

1. God created us in His image.

As you read Genesis 1:26-28, encourage your group to look for clues about what it means to be made in the image of God. Use "Further Commentary" if needed (leader p. 11).

Show God's original intention for creation to exist in harmony and peace. Explain the meaning of being made in the image of God and how this reality sets us apart from the animal kingdom (leader p. 11; personal study p. 11).

- ? What are some ways that human creativity is a reflection of God's own creativity? What are some differences between human creativity and God's creativity?

Introduce James 3:9 as reiterating the truth of the innate worth and value of humans made in God's image (leader p. 12).

- ? How should humanity's innate value as image bearers change the way we relate to each other? How should it change the way we view competitors at work, bad neighbors, terrorists, persecutors of Christians, and otherwise hostile people?

2. God created us to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever.

Mention Spurgeon's catechism question about the purpose of humanity as a lead-in to reading Psalm 16:11 (leader p. 12; personal study p. 12). Use "Further Commentary" to show this verse's twofold meaning (leader p. 12).

Highlight the truth that glorifying God goes beyond those activities we relegate to church worship. All of life is to be lived to the glory of God (leader p. 12; personal study p. 12).

- What does glorifying God look like outside of the church doors? At work? At home? During recreation?

Explain the different aspects of reflecting God's glory, including our being made in the image of God and our capacity to think, feel joy and pleasure, and find ultimate satisfaction in God. Read 1 Corinthians 10:31 to show how God is to be glorified in all aspects of our lives (leader p. 13; personal study pp. 12-13).

- What are some ways we can invest God-glorifying significance in the more mundane aspects of our lives? How do we glorify God in all things without making those things idols?

3. We have shattered God's image in us and failed at our purpose.

Follow the Bible's story line from creation to the flood. As you read Genesis 9:1-7, ask your group to observe its similarities and differences with Genesis 1:26-28. Highlight the ways in which the image of God remains in humanity but is now distorted by sin (leader pp. 14-15; personal study pp. 13-14).

- Some people say, "To err is human." Based on what we know of God's original purposes for humanity, is this statement true? Are we more human when we sin or less?

Use the examples of brokenness to show how sin's terrible consequences spread into society and lead us to seek glory in all the wrong places (leader pp. 15-16; personal study p. 14).

- What are some ways you find yourself looking for approval, recognition, and affirmation? How is the gospel the answer to this longing?

Mention the truth that all human beings bear God's image, whether they believe in Him or not (leader p. 16; personal study p. 15).

- Can you think of ways that people who deny the existence of God nonetheless show off His glory and goodness?

Conclusion

Wrap up this lesson with the story of the kidnapped girl being reunited with her family. Connect this story to our mission as believers—to reintroduce people to the Heavenly Father (leader p. 17; personal study p. 15). Conclude with the "For Reflection" questions.

? For Further Discussion

What is the danger of making a sharp distinction between activities that are *sacred* and activities that are *secular*?

? For Further Discussion

What responsibility do we have to God's world as His image bearers?

? For Further Discussion

Why does self-centeredness fail to reflect the image of God?

? For Reflection

As we talked through this session, what aspects or points struck you or surprised you?

Do you have a tendency to see others—especially our "enemies"—as God's image bearers or something less? What does repentance look like here?

Do you have unbelieving friends with whom you can talk about the image of God in them?

Expanded Lesson Content

Created to Reflect

Session 1



Opening Illustration and Introduction

The story of the Bible begins with a startling fact. Once upon a time, there was nothing. No universe. No Milky Way. No sun, no stars, no moon. No Smoky Mountains, no Red Sea, no Andes, no Nile, no Pacific. Once upon a time, creation wasn't. And then, with a word, it was.

If we've learned anything from human history, from countless generations staring slack-jawed at the stars, peering through crude spyglasses and billion-dollar telescopes that orbit the earth, we've learned that the universe is a big place. Everything is a testimony to the grand imagination that made it—a singular, creative Genius who thought up the Horsehead Nebula and the ladybug, black holes and electric eels, Bach and Hank Williams.

Harold Best points out that God, who made everything without reference to anything that had come before, is the first truly abstract artist. He says, "When God created the first giraffe, he did not have one to imitate or to copy. It came out of his imagination and, in the finest sense of the word, was abstract, because it did not look like anything else; it had no exterior reference point."¹ Creation's nearly endless diversity is a testimony to the endless imagination of the Creator.



How does the fact of creation—the fact that everything exists because God imagined it and spoke it into being—change the way we see the natural world?

In this vast universe, this mind-boggling expanse of life, energy, and beauty, one creature is singled out for a unique project—a special creation given a gift like no other. God made man and woman, and He made them in His image and likeness.

Voices from Church History

"The most distinctive feature of the biblical understanding of man is the teaching that man has been created in the image of God."²

—Anthony Hoekema (1913-1988)

Voices from Church History

"There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit."³

—C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)

Lesson Summary

In this session we examine the biblical truth that God created humans in His image with the purpose of glorifying Him and enjoying Him forever. Because we are made in the image of God, we have innate worth and value and are different from the rest of creation. But due to our sin, the image of God in humanity has been shattered, and we fail to fulfill our purpose. Thankfully, God has a plan to restore us through His Son.

1. God created us in His image (Gen. 1:26-28).

²⁶ Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.”

²⁷ So God created man in His own image;

He created him in the image of God;

He created them male and female.

²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them: “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth.”

This passage shows how God gifted humanity with His *image*—a word that rings out with poetry and more than a little mystery. That gift is a crown of glory. It sets us apart from creation and gives us a unique place in the world. We experience it as we reflect God’s glory, relate to others, work, and rest. In a sense, reflecting God’s image is shorthand for everything we do. Our working, resting, and relating are all ways of reflecting God.

Creation was designed for us to take a central place, ruling over and caring for creation, while living in community with one another in a way that mirrored God’s own nature. In a world without sin, humanity would have reigned in harmony and peace. No violence, no scheming against one another, no scrambling up ladders of success and spitting on those beneath us, no divisions based on race, social status, poverty, or wealth.

Instead, the world would be marked by all that God Himself is. Business dealings would be just and fair (Lev. 25:14). Relationships would be built upon faithfulness and trust (Matt. 5:37). Love would be at the heart of our care for one another (Zech. 7:9), for creation, and most of all, for God Himself (Deut. 6:5). The image of God is a mantle of glory, given to frail human flesh, setting us a little lower than the angels (Heb. 2:7).

That gift is also the reason humanity has distinguished itself from the animal kingdom. No pigs practice medicine; no horses coach in the NFL; no dogs earn PhDs. It’s God’s image that makes humans creative, that spurs ingenuity and imagination, that leads us to take things like petroleum, iron ore, and electricity and make things like iPhones, cars, and skyscrapers.

Further Commentary

“There has been debate about the expression ‘image of God.’ Many scholars point out the idea, commonly used in the ancient Near East, of the king who was the visible representation of the deity; thus the king ruled on behalf of the god. Since v. 26 links the image of God with the exercise of dominion over all the other creatures of the seas, heavens, and earth, one can see that humanity is endowed here with authority to rule the earth as God’s representatives or vice-regents. Other scholars, seeing the pattern of ‘male and female,’ have concluded that humanity expresses God’s image in relationship, particularly in well-functioning human community, both in marriage and in wider society. Traditionally, the image has been seen as the capacities that set man apart from the other animals—ways in which humans resemble God, such as in the characteristics of reason, morality, language, a capacity for relationships governed by love and commitment, and creativity in all forms of art. All these insights can be put together by observing that the *resemblances* (man is like God in a series of ways) allow mankind to *represent* God in ruling, and to establish worthy *relationships* with God, with one another, and with the rest of creation.”⁴

—T. Desmond Alexander, *ESV Study Bible*.



Voices from Church History

“To live was to enjoy, when every faculty was in its perfection, amidst abundance of objects which infinite wisdom had purposely suited to it... when he was at full liberty to enjoy either the Creator or the creation; to indulge in rivers of pleasure, ever new, ever pure, from any mixture of pain.”⁵

—John Wesley (1703-1791)



Further Commentary

The words of Psalm 16:11, originally penned by King David, speak to the truth that in God we find fulfillment and joy, our only source of life. The apostle Peter (Acts 2:25-31) would later apply these words to Jesus’ resurrection. The Son of God found joy in willingly submitting to the Father’s will, even unto death, and through His sacrifice conquered death for us all. So notice the twofold meaning of this passage. *First*, we were created for an unending life of enjoying God. *Second*, because of Christ’s death and through His resurrection, God’s original design is restored so that when we repent and believe, we are reunited with God—the source of life, in whom we find eternal pleasure.



What are some ways that human creativity is a reflection of God’s own creativity? What are some differences between human creativity and God’s creativity?

Though all of creation is a testimony to God’s craftsmanship and brilliance, humanity alone bears the gift and the responsibilities that come with bearing God’s image. It’s why human dignity matters to God. As the Book of James tells us, “We praise our Lord and Father with [our tongue], and we curse men who are made in God’s likeness with it” (Jas. 3:9). James was disturbed at how with one word we glorify the God who made us and with the next we curse others who are made in His image and reflect His glory. James remembered what we so often forget—that to trash humanity, to dismiss the value of human life for reasons of bitterness, spite, racism, sexism, or inconvenience, is to dismiss God’s image alive in others.



How should humanity’s innate value as image bearers change the way we relate to each other? How should it change the way we view competitors at work, bad neighbors, terrorists, persecutors of Christians, and otherwise hostile people?

2. God created us to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever (Ps. 16:11; 1 Cor. 10:31).

Charles Spurgeon, in his catechism, wrote that the purpose of humanity is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Spurgeon’s thoughts echoed the psalmist, who wrote in Psalm 16:11:

*“You reveal the path of life to me;
in Your presence is abundant joy;
in Your right hand are eternal pleasures.”*

It’s in the Person and presence of God that humanity finds its greatest joy, satisfaction, and sense of fulfillment. We were meant to live in community with God and one another, and this is evident in Genesis 1–2.

But notice how glorifying God in Genesis isn’t simply a 24/7 worship service. We see no hymn singing, no prayer services, no preaching. Too often, our understanding of *glorifying God* is narrowly defined. We hear a churchy word like *glorify* and think immediately of church services and praise choruses. But that’s not what we see in Genesis. Instead, in a world of unhindered glory-reflecting, God shows us a man working in the garden, naming animals, and falling in love with a woman made from his rib. For Adam, all of life was glorifying to God. His worship and glory-reflecting were rooted in who he was (an image bearer), not just the specific things he did.



What does glorifying God look like outside of the church doors? At work? At home? During recreation?

The psalmist also shows us that a human being is, by his or her very nature, a glorious creature (Ps. 8:3-5). Having glory isn't a conscious decision we make; it's part of our being. We're made with brains and bodies that do wondrous things. Our imaginations can take us away on daydreams and fantasies. We have a remarkable capacity for building, planning, and scheming together. The great achievements of the arts and sciences testify to the glory of humanity, but so do the capacity for love between a father and child and the shared wisdom of a grandparent.


Our capacity for joy and pleasure is also part of our glory. We were made with the ability to see, taste, touch, smell, and hear the world around us, to experience this world with joyful curiosity. The burning colors of fall and the icy blanket of winter; the smell of grilled chicken at a summer barbecue; the rushing wash of surf on a shoreline; and the taste of a tomato taken straight off the vine, sliced, salted, and eaten in the sun—life bombards us with beauty, goodness, and wonder. Alone among creation, we have the ability to turn our joy-filled hearts from these wonderful creations to the Creator who dreamed them up and gave them to us.

Riffing a little on Spurgeon's catechism, John Piper says, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him."⁶ He argues that as we find our ultimate sense of joy and satisfaction in God, His glory will be most evident in us. In other words, a glorifying life is a joyful, satisfied life in God.

We best reflect God's glory as we find joy and satisfaction in Him, in His purposes, and in His designs for life, relationships, work, and rest. We were meant to live in constant wonder and joy at the world He has made and the places He has given us in it. This purpose is why the apostle Paul admonished in 1 Corinthians 10:31:

³¹ Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for God's glory.

This is the good life, life as it was meant to be lived—participating in and reflecting the glory of the God who made us in His image. Sometimes we think seeking the kingdom means we only concentrate on spiritual things, getting through the drudgery of earthly things every day to focus our attention on God. But this idea sets up a divide that God did not intend. Eating and drinking are earthly things, yet Paul believed we should do them to the glory of God. Because God is the Creator of all of life, we should be aware that every area of our existence is impacted by His existence. Our relationship with God gives significance to every aspect of our lives.

 What are some ways we can invest God-glorifying significance in the more mundane aspects of our lives? How do we glorify God in all things without making those things idols?

Voices from Church History

"Leave the works in one class. Consider one as good as another. Fear God, and be just, as has been said. And then do whatever comes before you. This way all will be well done even though it is no more than loading manure or driving a mule."⁷

—Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Voices from Church History

"The great God of the universe who heaped up the mountains, scooped out the oceans, and flung out the stars wants to have a relationship with you."⁸

—Adrian Rogers (1931-2005)

Further Commentary

“This blessing fortifies the parallels between Noah and Adam (Gen. 1:28), as both blessings began with the command to ‘be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.’ However, in Noah’s day the blessing is altered. Mankind is still to take dominion over creation, but due to the presence of sin, the harmony that existed in the garden of Eden had forever ended.”

“Because ‘God made man in his image,’ the taking of a human life by either an animal or another person was not treated like the death of an animal. ‘Every animal’ and ‘every man’ who killed another human being was to have its own ‘blood...shed by man’ as a just punishment... No such law exists for the killing of animals; the Bible consistently teaches that human beings are of superior worth to animals.”⁹

—Robert D. Bergen,
HCSB Study Bible

3. We have shattered God’s image in us and failed at our purpose (Gen. 9:1-7).

Everything changed in Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve sinned. The harmony of creation, led by the perfect image-bearing lives of the first man and woman, turned to discord and chaos. Death and disease followed, and every kind of evil was birthed in the hearts of men.

The situation became so dire that God determined to start over—saving only one man and his family. It’s a familiar story, one that we turn into a bedtime story for our children and illustrate with stuffed animals and plastic toys. But it’s far from a cute story about animals and boats. It’s a stunning revelation of the wrath of God as He wiped out every living thing except those on Noah’s ark.

In the aftermath, God gave Noah a new promise:

¹ God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. ² The fear and terror of you will be in every living creature on the earth, every bird of the sky, every creature that crawls on the ground, and all the fish of the sea. They are placed under your authority. ³ Every living creature will be food for you; as I gave the green plants, I have given you everything. ⁴ However, you must not eat meat with its lifeblood in it. ⁵ I will require the life of every animal and every man for your life and your blood. I will require the life of each man’s brother for a man’s life.

⁶ Whoever sheds man’s blood, his blood will be shed by man, for God made man in His image.

⁷ But you, be fruitful and multiply; spread out over the earth and multiply on it.”

In many ways, this passage is an echo of the original promise God gave to Adam and Eve before the fall. Do you see the similarities? But notice the ominous difference. Even after starting afresh, God acknowledged the inevitable return of evil. Even the flood couldn’t wash away the curse. So here we see God reaffirming the truth that His image remains in man, but in these instructions, it’s clear that something has gone horribly wrong. People will kill each other.

God’s purpose for humanity remains visible in this passage, but the distorted effects of sin are also visible. Men and women were meant to be glory-reflectors, but instead, they became scheming and murderous, a dim and fractured version of themselves.

We see dysfunction all around us. It’s evident in large ways in the horrible news aired nightly on TV, and it’s evident in small ways as we see all kinds of human suffering—disease, dysfunction, poverty, and affliction of all kinds.

As I write this, even now, I'm sitting in a coffee shop in my neighborhood. A few tables away sits a man by himself. He's a familiar face; I see him almost daily walking through the neighborhood pushing a wheelchair piled high with trash, recyclables, and a dingy duffle bag. His hair is matted and shaggy, his skin dark and flaky with a patina of sweat and oil. The tables around him are empty. The other customers regard him anxiously as his head bobs up and down and his mouth moves in sharp, jerky motions. He laughs, frowns, and whispers quick, wordless phrases. His eyes flicker like a candle in and out of focus, bouncing from object to object, from one nervous face to another.

His story is probably a familiar tragedy, one that his illness and inner turmoil prohibit him from sharing in any rational way. But he too is made in the image of God. Life in our shattered world has hammered him into a shell of what he was meant to be, perhaps by his own hand, perhaps by the evil actions of others. He was meant for glory, but instead, he shuffles about the neighborhood collecting and selling trash, hustling for spare change, and eating out of garbage cans.

His suffering and brokenness are all too familiar. We see it in the shame of a young woman who sells herself on street corners or on Internet chat rooms and video screens. We see it in the hollow eyes of an addict. We see it in the tyranny of an insecure boss or a military dictator. And if we are totally honest with ourselves, we see it in the mirror.



Some people say, "To err is human." Based on what we know of God's original purposes for humanity, is this statement true? Are we more human when we sin or less?

Sin's consequences spread like kudzu, growing into entangled institutions of oppression and suffering. A world once marked by peace and abundance now bears the scars of enculturated evil. People scour the dumps of Guatemala City for scraps they can eat or use to build shelters. Children are sold to brothels by heartless, desperate parents and endure unimaginable torture at the hands of their captors. Madmen walk into movie theaters, killing anyone unfortunate enough to be present.

This brokenness isn't only on display on the front pages of newspapers and websites. It's on display in our living rooms and workplaces, our bedrooms and backyards. We hurt those we love with lies and half-truths. We manipulate and maneuver to make sure we come out on top in conflicts. We think of ourselves over and above others. Our lives, meant to be a reflective outpouring of the love of God, are instead a cesspool of inward self-interest.

Perhaps deep down we know we're broken. We're disconnected from our Creator, adrift in a world that is hostile to us and alienated from one another. Perhaps our deep brokenness is no great secret.



Voices from Church History

"Whoever sheds someone's blood, his own will be shed in payment for that person's blood, because I have made the human person in God's image.' Consider, I ask you, how much fear he struck in them with that remark. He is saying even if you are not restrained from murderous hands by kinship or by a sense of fellowship of nature, and even if you thrust aside all brotherly feeling and become completely committed to a bloody murder, you must think twice. Consider the fact that the person has been created in God's image. Mark the degree of honor accorded him by God! Think on the fact that he has received authority over all creation. Then you will give up your murderous intent."¹⁰

—John Chrysostom
(circa 347-407)

Voices from the Church


“This sense of being made in God’s image calls us all constantly to look for it in others and to do what we can to help them acknowledge it and to realize it by joining in worship. We thereby carry to others the answer to their inmost longing, a yearning for union with the Trinity, a thirst to respond with adoration to the God who made them.”¹¹

—Marva Dawn

This sense of fracture drives our efforts at self-improvement. We obsess over youth and beauty, longing for bodies that are leaner and younger than our own. Billions of dollars are spent each year on beauty products, cosmetic surgery, and get-fit-fast diets. Critics of this obsession assume that it’s all vanity, but what if it’s something else entirely? What if we were bound for glory, lost it, and are now desperate to get it back?

Could that explain some of our obsession with celebrity? Could that explain the willingness of otherwise ordinary people to endure the humiliation of certain “reality” TV shows? Could our longing for fame be rooted in how God made us? Could it be that we were meant to be creatures of beauty and worth, that sin has tragically robbed us of that beauty, and now we’re desperate to get it back, desperate to hear a voice tell us that we’re lovely and worthy again?


Think about this the next time you see someone bragging on Facebook or Twitter. Consider this when you hear the obnoxious bravado of sports stars and politicians. Consider it when you watch footage of a red carpet event in Hollywood or a prom night in a small town. Behind the glitter and swagger is a broken longing for the glory that was lost when, in Adam, we all died.

 What are some ways you find yourself looking for approval, recognition, and affirmation? How is the gospel the answer to this longing?

One final implication for this truth bears mentioning. Image bearing is part of what makes us human. It’s part of our nature, whether we’re a believer or an unbeliever.

Brilliant minds such as Stephen Hawking, though he might deny it, are a reflection of the brilliance of the great Engineer of the universe. It’s precisely because he’s made in God’s image that he’s able to contemplate the building blocks of matter and energy.

We are image bearers, even when we deny God. It’s hard-wired within us. Sin distorts this image and disconnects us from the One who gave it to us, but it doesn’t destroy it. Whatever measure of cleverness or creativity anyone has is a remnant—often a hollowed-out remnant—of the glory we were given as image bearers. One might rebel and fight against the Giver, just as a child might rebel against a parent. But rebellious children will nonetheless helplessly reflect the image of their parents in the lines of their face, their manner of speech, or their habits of posture.

 Can you think of ways that people who deny the existence of God nonetheless show off His glory and goodness?

Conclusion




Because everyone reflects God's image, we have a unique opportunity for mission. Imagine a girl who, at birth, was taken from her parents. For the next 25 years, she was deceived into believing that her kidnappers were her birth parents. For her whole life, she felt out of place. Why didn't she look like her "parents"? Why didn't she look like her brother and sister?

Now imagine if, one day, a detective came to her door and told her the truth. Imagine as the detective takes her on a long, tense car ride to meet her birth parents. She arrives at a house that is at once foreign and familiar and taken to a door that flies open before she can even knock. For the first time in her life, she stands face to face with her mother, an older mirror-image of herself. She sees it in the hazel of her eyes, the way she crosses her arms and squeezes her elbows with excitement. Her father enters, and she sees the prototype of her own face. Her mother begins to laugh and cry at the same time. The daughter joins her, a twin chorus of uncontainable joy.

The days that follow are an ongoing discovery of familiarity. Her love of literature is present in her father. Her love of cooking shared with her mother. She's an athlete, just like her sisters, whom she will soon meet. The connections keep forming, and it begins to dawn in her heart that at last she is home.

Her story is the story of everyone who's ever discovered, after years of longing for a sense of place and meaning, that they were made in the image of God. When we live on mission, sharing the gospel with the world around us, we have the opportunity to tell them that they were made for glory, that their love of beauty, their longing for relationships, and their hunger for justice are all pointing to their Heavenly Father. "You're not an orphan," we say. "You have a Father and a home."

We were made to reflect God's image. Sin has fractured it, denying us the experience of the glory we long for, yet the gospel invites us to experience it anew.

-  As we talked through this session, what aspects or points struck you or surprised you?
-  Do you have a tendency to see others—especially our "enemies"—as God's image bearers or something less? What does repentance look like here?
-  Do you have unbelieving friends with whom you can talk about the image of God in them?

References

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3. C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: HarperCollins, 1980), 46.
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5. Albert Outler and Richard Heitzenrater, eds., *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 16.
6. John Piper, *Desiring God* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2011), 10.
7. Martin Luther, *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, vol. 3, comp. Ewald Martin Plass (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 1512.
8. Adrian Rogers, *Adrianisms: The Wit and Wisdom of Adrain Rogers*, vol. 2 (Memphis: Love Worth Finding Ministries, 2007), 17.
9. Robert D. Bergen, *HCSB Study Bible* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 23, 26, n. 9:1-2; n. 9:5-6.
10. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 27.15, in *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1947-), 82:172, quoted in *Genesis 1-11*, ed. Andrew Louth, vol. 1 in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 152.
11. Marva J. Dawn, *In the Beginning, God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 44.

Additional Resources

Created to Reflect

Devotional Material

Encourage your group to read the three devotional readings included in the *Personal Study Guide*.

Study Material

- “Human Nature”—Chapter 7 by John S. Hammett from *A Theology for the Church*, edited by Daniel L. Akin
- “Who Are We?”—Chapter 4 from *Heaven Is a Place on Earth* by Michael E. Wittmer
- “In Whose Image?”—Chapter 13 from *How Now Shall We Live?* by Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey
- “What Is Human?”—Article by Jill Carattini; find a link to this article at gospelproject.com/additionalresources

Sermon Podcasts

Ray Ortlund Jr.: “Do All for the Glory of God”

Johnny Hunt: “Serve God”

Find links to these at gospelproject.com/additionalresources

Tip of the Week

Want Some Teaching Options?

Individuals are different. Teachers are different. Groups are different. What works for one may not work well for another. In recognition of this fact, we are making available a resource that provides teachers and group leaders with additional teaching options. This resource is available for each session and includes four or five interactive teaching options a teacher can make use of during group time and that point group members to their *Personal Study Guide*. You can download this document for free from gospelproject.com/additionalresources.