

“In the Image of God” or “The Good Life!”
Genesis 1:26-2:25
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I would like to outline the entire Bible for you; don't groan, it can be done in three phrases. The entire Bible can be outlined in these three phrases. With apologies to John Milton they are:

Paradise,
Paradise Lost,
Paradise Regained.

“Paradise” is described in Genesis 1 & 2

“Paradise Lost” is described in Genesis 3-11

“Paradise Regained” is described in Genesis 12 - Revelation 22

What God originally created and intended for his world is described in Genesis 1 and 2.

What human beings did to what God created is described in Genesis 3-11. From the first sin of Adam and Eve to the rebellion enacted in the tower of Babel - people took what God created and corrupted it.

What God has done and is doing to re-create his world is described in Genesis 12 - Revelation 22 (and possibly Genesis 3:15, 21). From God's call to Abraham in Genesis 12 to begin a new people for God, to the first coming of the Messiah (Jesus, who made possible the holiness needed for a new people), to the second coming of the Messiah (Jesus, who creates a new heavens and earth), God is re-creating his world to be what he originally intended.

What did He intend? What kind of life did God originally create and what kind of life is he re-creating? Genesis 1:27 tells us, “God saw all that he had made and it was very good.” Someone might well say, “It was perfect.” If life were perfect what would it be like?

Friday afternoon about 4 p.m. my wife and I were riding our motorcycle up the valley from Deckers to Pine. The river was sparkling as it meandered through the meadow. The fall leaves were shimmering in the afternoon sunlight. The wind was minimal, the sun

was warm and the air was cool. At one stop we looked at each other and said -“this is perfect”. The beauty we were observing and the physical comfort we were enjoying did seem perfect.

Later I got to thinking about what would make it imperfect: A cold hailstorm or a toxic chemical spill would put a damper on the perfection. An argument with my wife would do damage to it as well- it would change the enjoyment of that motorcycle ride considerably. And a conscience guilty before God would render the day less than perfect - in fact guilt could make it possible to ride through that beauty and never see it.

What would make life perfect? I'd like you to think about that question for a moment. What would make life truly good? Would it take a BMW Z-3; Health - to be living without pain or debilitating handicaps; sufficient physical resources such as food and shelter; activity - work and other activities that are meaningful and enjoyable; relationships - to love and be loved, to belong, to fit in, to fill a need in others, to enjoy and be enjoyable; to be at peace with God - no guilt, no fear - loving him and being loved by him? What would it take?

God looked at what he had created and he said, “It is very good!” There is a fairly popular phrase in evangelical circles that is too often bandied about tritely - It is “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.” If that's true that is an awesome reality. Another way of saying that is, “God, in love, created you and has called you to a life that is very good.”

When the author of Genesis wrote the second chapter, I am convinced he wanted his first readers to know their uniqueness and their purpose in creation. He wanted them to know how special they were to God in comparison to the rest of creation and he wanted them to hear again the way life was to be lived for it to be “very good”.

In this series of articles in Genesis, I will probably often mention the greater context in which the book was written. The likely author is Moses and it was probably written during the latter years of his life just before the people known as Israel - the Jews - were about to enter and live in the land of Canaan. One of Moses' great fears

expressed over and over again in the first five books of the Bible is that God's people would forget how unique they were and would forget what makes life truly good. He had a fear that they would begin to think like the people around them - that the good life consisted of power and wealth - influence and affluence; that the way to the good life was independence and self-centeredness.

Just before his death Moses said to the people: Deuteronomy 30:16 *"For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands...then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess."* Moses is not just talking about existence and quantity, he is describing how they will know a quality of life - a life that is very good.

Earlier, in that same speech, Moses recited for them again the 10 Commandments - that series of commands that describe how to live in relationship with God and each other and then he quoted God as saying (Deuteronomy 5:29) *"Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to...keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever."* And then Moses added, *"Walk in the way that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess."* These reminders in Deuteronomy are connected to Genesis.

The "good" life that God wants people to enjoy is anchored in the way he created people. God designed and created human beings with certain capacities, unique in all creation, and then called them to a way of life made possible by their unique capacities - and the result was a life that was "very good." The implication is probably too obvious to need repeating but every one of us longs for something beyond what we currently experience. Every human being searches for what will make life truly good. You hear that search expressed in the words of our popular songs. You see it manifested in the frenetic activity of so many lives. You see it in the unquenchable thirst people have for one new diversion after another - anything to put excitement or meaning into life.

In Genesis 2 we are taken back to the very foundation of our humanity and we are shown what it is that makes up the life we long

for. It starts with our uniqueness compared to all else in creation. It is said this way in Genesis 1:26-27 *“Then God said, Let us make man in our image, in our likeness... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.”*

Genesis 2 takes that brief description of chapter 1 and expands on it so that the uniqueness described as “image” and “likeness” in chapter 1 is expressed much more fully in chapter 2. Image and likeness are two different words with the same idea. God did something unique with humans. God gave them a capacity to represent him, to reflect him in ways nothing else on earth could.

Chapter 1 tells us what happened but it doesn’t tell us what it means. When we come to chapter 2, specifically 2:7 we get another expression of how unique human beings are: Genesis 2:7 “The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being.” Other creatures have life and have breath - but the description here, matching the “image/likeness” language of chapter 1, puts a special emphasis on the uniqueness of the creation of human beings. There is something very intimate about the metaphor in a word-picture of God breathing into the very face of that first human. And God’s description of him as “living being” is unique to humans and thus sets him apart from everything else God created.

For thousands of years, Bible scholars have debated how, exactly, humans have or bear the image of God. **My best understanding of it is that when God created human beings he gave them a capacity to relate and function in three ways that he did not give to any other living thing on this earth.** And I believe chapter 2 spells out the uniqueness of human beings in a very clear way. And this uniqueness is what makes human beings human. And it is what describes the good life for which God created us.

So my thesis is this: **To be most human, to be fully human, to be what God created us to be, to bear the image/likeness of God, to experience life at its fullest, becomes our experience when we relate properly to God, each other and the created world.** Do you

want to know life that is “very good”? Then pursue the life God created you to have, and you will.

First of all God created Adam and Eve to have a relationship with Himself. We have already seen that God created humans in a special way - with a special relationship to him. And in Genesis 1:26ff as in the rest of the Bible, God talks to them - God communicates with human beings. And he gives humans the capacity to hear and respond. In Genesis 2:16 the Lord God places the man in the garden of Eden and gives him a command. God gives him the capacity to obey - a spiritual capability. Human beings have the capacity to relate to God in a personal, conscious way. There is no biblical or experiential evidence that God has this relationship with any other earthly creature.

This created ability to consciously relate to God is one fundamental aspect of our humanity. We are most fully human when we know and obey and worship him. Lest all my words have obscured the point - Please remember, **if** it is life, real life, that people seek - they will only find it in relationship with God because that is how God made us. Pastor John Piper of Minneapolis, Minnesota, in his book Desiring God - Meditations of a Christian Hedonist (pleasure seeker) slightly alters the Westminster Confession of Faith to make a very important point. He writes “The chief end of man is to glorify God **by** enjoying him forever.” We are only fully human when we are in right relationship with God. King David said it this way: Psalm 27:4 *“One thing I have asked of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord...”* Saint Augustine wrote: “Thou madest us for thyself and our heart is restless until it rests in thee.” Elsewhere the Psalmist said, *“Delight yourself in the Lord.”* Paul wrote to the Christians in Philippi *“Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say rejoice.”*

God was saying loudly and clearly through Moses to the Israelites and to us - If a truly good life is what you want, remember it starts with a relationship with God - that is how he made us. When God created us in His own image/likeness he gave us the capacity to live in relationship with Him.

But he, secondly, gave us the capacity to relate to each other. There is something about Himself that God has built into humans only, that enables them to experience a relationship with each other. In a different context 500 years ago, John Donne wrote, “No man is an island.” A fully independent human being is an oxymoron. We were made to relate to others and without it we do not experience full humanity. God said of Adam before Eve was created, “It is not good for man to be alone.”

In the briefer, more succinct account of the creation of human beings in chapter 1 God has already indicated the social nature of humanity: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male **and** female he created them.” Of that interdependence between people God said that it was “very good” but before Eve was created, when the first human was alone, God said, “It is not good”.

In fact, in this second chapter, this issue of relationship to others is spoken to most of all. To be fully human is not only to relate to God but to relate to each other. The text tells us that God put Adam with the animals for at least two reasons, one of which is that Adam would discover what God already knew - Man alone was incomplete. Without relationships with other human beings we will never be fully human, never know life the way God created us to enjoy it.

To be sure, the epitome of that person to person relationship is found in the husband-wife relationship that is so beautifully described here. God said of Adam, “I will make a helper suitable for him.” That word “helper” is most often used of God and means the one who provides what is lacking. That word “suitable” means “corresponding to him” or literally “like opposite him”. She complements or completes him. Adam, as the first human was lacking. Alone, a human is incomplete. God created us to live in relationships. And when Adam experienced his full humanity, when he met another human being, he expressed the joy that comes from finally experiencing what God designed us to experience. “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!”

And so the OT is filled with commands from God about how to live in proper relationship with each other. Why? Because that is how we

experience the fullness of being human - all God wants for us to enjoy. And likewise the NT emphasizes the issue of our relationships with each other. The Sermon on the Mount and 1 Corinthians 13 are but examples of what God calls us to because he knows we cannot enjoy being human without love for each other.

I am most human when I love as Jesus loves. Trying to live a life of “Just me and God” or pretending the Christian life is one of just being rightly related to God will fail. Withdrawing from others, harboring resentment toward others, will work against the joy of being a human being because we were made to live in loving relationships.

God is not just re-creating for himself individuals. God is re-creating a PEOPLE - a community of believers. The NT stresses the issue of people in relationship with each other. The Gospel breaks down barriers between ethnic groups, between races, between socio-economic groups, between men and women. The church as a body, a community, a corporate unity is what the gospel is about. It is not enough for us to be forgiven - God wants so much more - he wants us to know the fullness of living in right relationship with others.

To live life as fully as God intended it, not only has God given us the capacity to live in right relationship to him and with each other but God has also given us the capacity to care for this earth.

Look at Genesis 2:15 where being human is described this way: *“the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden **to work it and to take care of it.**”* Just a few verses later God specifically gives Adam a task on the earth - he commands him to name the animals. In the Bible, having the authority to name something indicated that the “namer” in fact has authority over the thing being named. God was calling on Adam to act on the command God had given him in verse 15 and earlier in chapter 1 when God said, *“Subdue the earth. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”* Now clearly this “subduing and ruling” are not commands to destroy but as 2:15 makes clear, they are commands to work and care for. Stewardship of the earth, work that is purposeful, creativity that cares for the world God has first created, are what God has created us to do. Christians ought to

be in the forefront of environmentalism. Christians are to be leaders in the humane treatment of animals. We work because God works. We care for the earth because God created it and we represent God. God has given us the capacity to have dominion over the creatures of the earth - to be most fully human is to work that responsibility in the name of God. Rightly relating to the rest of creation is not just something we are to do in this life, on this earth, but because it is part of being human, because it is part of bearing the image of God, both the OT and NT teach it is something we will do in the new earth for eternity.

To be human is to rightly relate to God, to each other and to the earth.

We will see next, from chapter 3, what sin does to this original design of God for human beings. We know that, left to ourselves, it is now impossible for us to relate to God, each other and this earth the way God planned. Sin has corrupted our humanity - our humanness. Sin renders us incapable of acting out a proper worship of God - instead we place ourselves above God. Sin diminishes our capacity to love others and instead we become self-centered. Sin skews our perspective on our relationship to the earth and we become selfish rather than stewards.

For us to know the life God created us to enjoy the Bible teaches we need a new heart - the old one has been corrupted by our sin. We need a miraculous intervention by God - wherein he forgives our sin and restores in us the fullness of his image - the capacities to love him, each other and the world he has created.

Do we want the good life? It starts with a conversion - a new life in Christ. It continues with God teaching us and enabling us again to live life as he designed it - loving him with our whole heart, soul and strength and loving our neighbors as ourselves - and being God's stewards of this world.