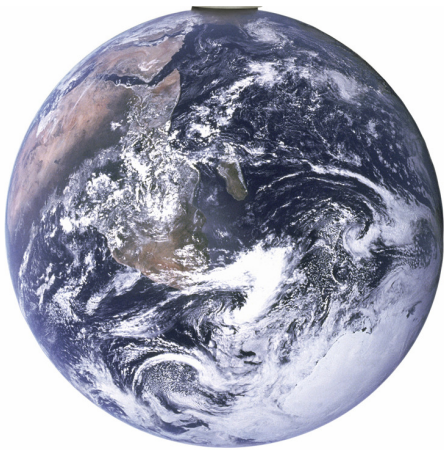


Re-imagining Life



Session 1: Where are we?

The Bible starts in a logical way with the account of the creation of the world. For over a hundred years, many Christians have looked at the first chapters of Genesis and wondered how they interact with the ongoing scientific discoveries and theories. These may be worthwhile areas to explore, but it is not the purpose of this study to do that.

We want to ask some far more basic questions about what the passage tells us about God, what it tells us about the world we live in and how we can live as whole-life disciples of Jesus in the real-world in which we find ourselves at home.

Many Christians have felt that God is only interested in religious or spiritual issues. But the creation of the world tells us another, really important story. God takes great care over the creation of the world. It really matters to him. All of it. Was that just for a short period of time? Or does he still have a plan and purpose for his creation. A clue to the answer is to be found in Romans 8, where Paul explains that creation is eagerly waiting the manifestation of the sons of glory. So for us who want to be whole-life disciples of Jesus, the good news is that it is part of our calling to enjoy and be grateful for the wonderful creation that is all around us. That, naturally, includes the wonderful complexity of other humans around us and their tremendous creativity. We have much to be grateful for.

In using the notes for the session, the 'orientation' section is there to point out issues to be found in the text. The 'reflect' section contains the questions that will hopefully provoke you to think together. The questions in italics are important, but we realise you may not get time to look at these. But you could think these through on your own or in different settings.

Of course, you may go off in different directions all together. Let that happen. But let these be the guidelines you hold to: stay focussed on thinking about how we can overcome the sacred/secular divide that often is so common amongst us and think about how our responses will help us to become whole-life disciples of Jesus.

You may find it helpful to begin your session by using the 'Imagine' DVD clip.....

Genesis 1

¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

² 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.

³ And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

⁴ God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

⁶ And God said, "Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water." ⁷ So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. ⁸ God called the expanse "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

⁹ And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so.

¹⁰ God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.

¹¹ Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. ¹² The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

¹⁴ And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. ¹⁶ God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day. ²⁰ And

God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky." ²¹ So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." ²³ And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. ²⁵ God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our

Notice

As you read, notice these features:

The orderliness of the creation account: chaos has no place here.

Creation has a purpose. It has not been abandoned. It is not careless, casual, or accidental.

The account is an account of God's relationship with the creation.

To use the word 'creation' means that you are saying something about the value of what has been created. This creation belongs to God.

The account of creation makes it clear that God is not just a vague indwelling spiritual power. He is separate from creation, but intensely involved in it.

God is not solely concerned about humans; he has a relationship with the rest of creation.

The repeated word is 'good'.

What strikes you as notable in the reading?

likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, [b] and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

²⁹ Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

¹ Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

² By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³ And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

People are honoured, respected and valued by God.

God only speaks to the humans he creates.

The Jews were not allowed to create anything in the image of God – so it's interesting that here they are seen to be in the image of God themselves. The image of God is seen in something that is free to be faithful, gracious, decisive, loving, as opposed to being in a statue or picture.

Sabbath is not primarily a day of worship but of rest originally. Keeping the Sabbath was an act that announced their faith in God. Life does not depend on our tireless effort, but depends on God. We are the masters of work not the other way around.

Reflect

Think about the areas of life that we normally label as 'secular' and those that we normally label 'spiritual'. What are you likely to put into a 'sacred' column and what in a 'secular' column? In the light of the creation story, does this easy division hold true?

What does this chapter tell us about God? What does it tell us about creation? A poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, described the world as being 'charged with the grandeur of God'. Where do you see this grandeur? After you have named some things you find wonderful, give thanks to God for them.

God has created all sorts of sources for pleasure. Whenever we experience enjoyment whilst still being able to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind then it can only be good. How does this balance between pleasure and our whole-hearted relationship with God help us to understand what it means to live as whole-life disciples?

At each stage of creation, God declared it 'good' or 'very good'. How far do we see this reflected in Christian attitudes to our world today?

How are we supposed to look at the world today? What makes us retreat from involvement with it? What makes us afraid? How can we approach this?

What does the phrase 'in his image' imply about what it means to be human and the purpose for which we are created?

Part of being in the image of God is that we are creators. What do you take delight in creating? Can you feel you can offer it to God? How do you make the things you create into an offering? How could we include these offerings in our worship together as a church?



Word for the Week

It's work that makes the world go round

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1:1

'Monday', Thomas Brazell said, 'is a bad way to spend a seventh of your life'. He has a point. Research indicates that Mondays are more manic or at least more dangerous to your health than any other day of the week. It's the day when you are most likely to have a heart attack or a stroke.

But work – for all its stresses – is what we're created for. It is what God did in the beginning and does now. God created. God worked. And at the end of his working day he says, 'It was good'. He doesn't dismiss this cosmic construction project as merely material or secular. It has significance for him. And he takes pleasure from the results. Along the way. Day by day. Even before the end-of-project appraisal. So the pleasure many of us get from a job well done, or sometimes just done, is 'spiritually' legitimate and can be played back to God in praise and gratitude.

Genesis chapter one also reveals that all creation was being prepared for the arrival of humankind; that God is getting everything ready for people to assume their roles as carers and stewards of creation, and to enjoy it with him. Our work should have the same intention – serving to create the conditions for human flourishing and responsibility and joy. God worked not just for his own pleasure but for the good of humankind. So too the role of work, of business, is not simply the generation of profit, but the stewardship of resources – human and material – for the benefit of *all* people, to the glory of God.

This is our calling.

Mark Greene