



A word on the Word

Journey through the Bible, book by book — by Carrie Boren, Missioner for Evangelism

In the beginning God...

created men and women in His own image

Within each of us is a desire for something more — an inner yearning to feel more at ease with ourselves and for a heightened sense of purpose, more fulfilling relationships, healthier bodies, and more satisfying work. Above all, our hearts, consciously or unconsciously, cry out for a peace that passes all understanding, a peace that comes from God alone.

We feel out of place, as if the world is not quite as it should be. We have an empty hole in our hearts that we can't explain. C.S. Lewis wrote, "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world" (*Mere Christianity*, p. 106). The truth is, God did make us for another world. Sin — which is nothing less than human disobedience, selfishness, and pride — distorted and disfigured the good, harmonious world God created in the beginning. Therefore, in order to make sense of our lives, we must return to our beginnings that the Genesis narrative depicts, illuminating God's plan for His creation. As we explore our origins, we can begin to grasp our identity and purpose here on earth.

Who is God? — God's loving nature and His good creation

Genesis tells us that God created the heavens and the earth and found them good, and that "God created people in his own image; God patterned them after himself; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). He is the one who brought something out of nothing. Everything and everyone depend on Him who gives them being. God does not create out of need or weakness but out of His goodness and love in order to show His glory. St. Bonaventure explains that God created "not to increase His glory, but to show it forth and communicate it" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p. 86). St. Thomas Aquinas adds, "Creatures came into existence when the key of love opened His hand" (*Ibid.*).

Creation starts with total goodness and pure love. All things, especially humans, begin in perfect harmony with each other and with the triune, benevolent God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Who am I?

The Genesis narrative depicts man and woman as the apex of God's perfect creation. When He created them in His image, He found them "very good." He intended that they should "share in His truth, goodness, and beauty — this is the glory for which God created them" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p. 94). God formed them from the "dust of the ground and breathed into [their] nostrils the breath of life." (Gen. 2:7) As humans, we are both corporeal and spiritual — body and soul. God's stamp is in each one of us.

St. John Chrysostom wrote, man is "that great and wonderful living creature, more precious in the eyes of God than all other creatures! For him the heavens and the earth, the sea and all the rest of creation exist. God attached so much importance to His salvation that He did not spare His own son for the sake of man" (St. John Chrysostom, in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p. 102).

Humans share five characteristics of God's image

His rational image — We are the only creatures capable of knowing and understanding God and His creation. Although our ability is finite, we can comprehend and grasp knowledge. God communicates with us using logic in his Word. In humility — acknowledging our limitations — we can understand and follow God's revelation of Himself. Human intellect reflects the Supreme source of Reason.

His moral image — We all believe some things are right and some are wrong. Although God's perfect moral standard is sometimes skewed in us because we are fallen and we occasionally disagree over what is right and what is wrong, our consciences are a reflection of God's image. Our desire for morality reveals the image within us of the moral law Giver.

His personal, relational image — In each human being resides a desire for significance and relationship. We all look for meaning and purpose in our lives, and we long for relationship. We reflect the image of a God of purpose who embodies relationship in His essence — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

His volitional image — We are people who choose. Our ability to make choices in life reflects God's image.

His administrative image — In the Genesis account, God makes the first male and female — Adam and Eve — His stewards or vice-regents.

Barbara Mouser, author of *Five Aspects of Man and Woman*, summarizes:

"God is righteous and just — we have a conscience.

God is sovereign — we have a will.

God is love — we are persons with the capacity to love and be loved.

God is all-knowing — we have minds.

God is all-powerful — we have some power.

God is immutable — we have character stability."

What is our purpose on earth?

Gen. 1:28 says, "God blessed them and told them, 'Multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. Be masters over the fish and birds and all the animals.'" God's first command to us is to rule, subdue, and produce. He has made us responsible for our world, our community, and our work — to rule (make decisions); subdue (bring under control with diligent maintenance); and produce (be productive in all we do — work, family, friendships, service, evangelism). Mouser explains, "In addition to responsibility and capability, we have authority to rule the earth for God." God has given gifts and talents to each one of us and placed us in jobs, families, communities, churches, and friendships where we are accountable to Him.

Above all, Genesis affirms that God created us for relationship with Him and each other. Our purpose is to love Him and one another. Sometimes when relationships go awry or we feel God is uncaring, we must remember that God is good and intends for us to be in healthy relationships with each other and in union with Him. From the beginning of the world, God loved us with a passion beyond measure. He has never wavered in His desire to be with us, guiding us, loving us, and giving us the world. This was and is His plan all along and our purpose for being.

May we see and celebrate God's image in each person and ourselves.