Unit 1, Session 2

God’s Good People

Summary and Goal
In the previous session, we traced the first five-and-a-half days of creation, seeing that God created everything good for His Son. In this session, we will examine the rest of the creation account and focus on the pinnacle of creation—humanity. In doing so, we will see that God created people to be unique from the rest of His creation and to bear His image in every facet of life. It is in bearing God’s image that we find our dignity and purpose and the foundation for our relationships with God and others.

Session Outline
1. We bear God’s image in how we rule over the world (Gen. 1:26-31).
2. We bear God’s image in how we work and rest (Gen. 2:1-3,15).
3. We bear God’s image in how we relate to Him and others (Gen. 2:16-18,21-25).

Session in a Sentence
People were created by God to bear His image in every facet of our lives.

Christ Connection
Jesus is the image of the invisible God, and as such, He is the perfect Ruler over the world, the One whose perfect work earns our everlasting rest, and the One who restores our relationships with God and others.

Missional Application
Because we are image bearers of God, we reflect His glory in how we steward the earth, work and rest, and cultivate relationships with Him and others.
A few years ago there was a news story about a man who had perhaps the worst day ever. One day after his wife delivered their fifth child, the man sold an old jewelry box at a garage sale. The problem was that his wife had placed her wedding ring inside the box for safekeeping. Without knowing it, the man sold the box—and the $23,000 ring tucked away inside it—for what he thought was a fair price: $10. While not many of us have given away a $23,000 ring, at one time or another we have made the mistake at the core of this blunder: We have greatly misunderstood and undervalued something.

Our experiences of undervaluing an object can be painful, but we have all made the greater mistake of failing to value humanity as we should (refer to this paragraph in the DDG).

We have each experienced the sting of undervaluing an object, but we have all made a greater mistake—a more costly one—as well. And many of us continue to repeat this mistake day in and day out: We fail to value humanity, both in us and in others, as we should.

Our culture considers “enlightened advances” as helping us understand our humanity more than ever before, but the best definition of humanity is found at the beginning of the story of humanity.

Commentary: As a culture, we tend to think we know more than we actually do about our humanity. We celebrate our “enlightened advances,” advances that continue to redefine humanity and lead us to believe that we understand it more than ever before.

But does the fullest definition of humanity lie before us? Are we inching closer to it with every tweak and adjustment we make? Or in fact, has the best and truest definition of humanity already been shared with us? Is our culture actually moving away from it? We find the answer in a place that should not surprise us—the beginning of the story of humanity in Genesis 1–2.

SUMMARIZE: In the previous session, we traced the first five-and-a-half days of creation, seeing that God created everything good for His Son. In this session, we will examine the rest of the creation account and focus on the pinnacle of creation—humanity.
Point 1: We bear God’s image in how we rule over the world (Gen. 1:26-31).

READ: Ask a volunteer to read Genesis 1:26-31, asking the group to highlight each reference to “image” and “rule” (DDG p. 21).

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, the whole 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.” 29 God also said, “Look, I have given you every seed-bearing plant on the surface of the entire earth and every tree whose fruit contains seed. This will be food for you, 30 for all the wildlife of the earth, for every bird of the sky, and for every creature that crawls on the earth—everything having the breath of life in it—I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. 31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good indeed. Evening came and then morning: the sixth day.

EXPLAIN: Help your group recognize two distractions from the definition for humanity that God provided in the creation account at the beginning of the story of Scripture (refer to this paragraph in the DDG).

With our focus on what’s wrong with ourselves plaguing us from within and our culture’s shifting landscape of humanity bombarding us from outside, it is easy for us to forget that God has provided the definition of humanity.

- Distraction 1: Ourselves. Our quest for perfection and worth drives us to focus on our deficiencies—what we perceive to be wrong with ourselves, where we fall short of our idealized standard of beauty and value. Illustration: If you have ever taken a group picture, you have experienced this. It’s nearly impossible to take a great group photo because inevitably someone will not be happy with how he or she looks in it, even if everyone looks great from your perspective.

- Distraction 2: Our Culture. We live in a world seeking to define and redefine humanity, where human rights based on the definition of the day are paramount. A positive result of this is that we are more attuned and responsive to the humanitarian crises and injustices all around us, such as racism, male chauvinism, police brutality, slavery, and sex-trafficking. But the flip side of this is that our culture is more confused than ever about what it means to be a person—to be human.

INTERACT: Ask the following question to help group members evaluate the way the world attempts to redefine what it means to be human.
In what ways do you see the world attempting to redefine what it means to be human? (based on one’s contribution to humanity; self-esteem; self-fulfillment; self-awareness; superiority over others)

**FILL IN THE BLANKS:** Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 21), emphasizing that the creation account helps us understand humanity and discover what gives us worth and purpose—being created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27).

**Image of God in Humanity:** The image of God in humanity is understood as mirroring God’s attributes in our nature, actions, and relational capacities.

**Essential Doctrine “Image of God in Humanity”:** The image of God in humanity is understood as mirroring God’s attributes in our nature, actions, and relational capacities. In Jesus, we see the true image of God. He perfectly mirrors God’s attributes, fulfills God’s will, and enjoys a perfect relationship with the Father. The Bible continues to speak of the image of God in humanity even after our fall into sin, even though our ability to rightly reflect God has been marred.

**SAY:** Being made in God’s image includes these different ideas:
- Points to our relational nature, echoing the relational nature between the Father, Son, and Spirit.
- Clarifies what unites humanity to God while simultaneously setting us apart from other creatures—spirituality, morality, language, and creativity, for example.
- Highlights our task to rule under God’s overarching rule (v. 26).

**EXPLAIN:** God’s sovereign rule over all of His creation means He doesn’t need help ruling over it, yet He has chosen to create us with the unique capacity and calling to rule. Almighty God has singled out humanity for this task and placed us above all other creatures (Ps. 8:3-8). Because God values human life and sets it apart from all other life, we are to do the same (see Gen. 9:5-6). Our rule over creation should be marked by a deep, unwavering regard for human beings of every tongue, tribe, and nation (refer to this paragraph in the DDG).

God has placed us as stewards over all creation, and our rule should reflect its value and more importantly the value of its Creator. The greatest way we do this, the greatest way we bear the image of God, is by valuing the pinnacle of His creation—humanity.

**INTERACT:** Ask the following question to help group members consider how our role as rulers over creation impacts how we relate to other image bearers.

**How should all people bearing the image of God impact how we relate with one another?** (we should treat all people with respect; we should care for and provide for those in need; we should use the resources of this world to honor God and God’s image bearers)
**Point 2:** We bear God’s image in how we work and rest (Gen. 2:1-3,15).

**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read Genesis 2:1-3,15 (DDG p. 22).

1 So the heavens and the earth and everything in them were completed. 2 On the seventh day God had completed his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. 3 God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, for on it he rested from all his work of creation.

15 The Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it.

**SAY:** God designed work—our vocation as well as every other form of work—to be part of how we fulfill His mandate to rule over creation. And even now as we work, we bear the image of the One who brought all things into existence by the work of His spoken word.

**PACK ITEM 2: TEMPLES OF GOD:** Use this Spurgeon quote poster to help your group members see a purposeful direction for their work, even though it is often difficult, frustrating, and mired in sin.

**Commentary:** Even if we love what we do for a living, work can be difficult. But we see here that work is part of God’s plan. Adam was placed in the garden of Eden to work before the fall. Work, then, is not a result of sin, although the difficulty we experience in our work certainly is (see Gen. 3:17-19). Humanity’s ability to work provides us with great power over creation, but our problem is that on our own, we lack direction for that work. And work not done in the image of God for the glory of God is done in defiance of God.

**READ:** End this section on work for the Lord with the following paragraph in the DDG, emphasizing the need for the gospel to redeem our work today.

We have staggering potential for work by our creation, but because of our sin, that potential drives us away from the One who placed it within us. But there is good news. Our capacity and power to glorify God through work is not destroyed, only distorted. God’s image can be seen in our work when we work for the Lord in His power, for His glory, and according to His will (Col. 3:23). The gospel redeems our work today and gives us hope for the day when we will finally be able to glorify God perfectly in our work.

**INSTRUCT:** Call attention to Pack Item 2: Temples of God and ask group members to evaluate the motivation for their work with the first scale in their DDG (p. 22).
Where would you put your work in the image of God on this scale?

Done for People          Done for the Lord

**EXPLAIN:** Emphasize the importance of rest as modeled by God (Gen. 2:2-3): Rest is for our good and glorifies God when it follows from faith.

**Commentary:** On the seventh day, after God completed His work of creating the heavens and the earth, He rested. Not because He needed to. God was not weary from His labor. He is all-powerful. He is infinite and does not grow tired. Instead, God’s resting signaled that His creative work was completed.

But God’s resting matters for another reason: In His rest from work, we find a pattern for our work and rest. All rest and no work does not reflect the image of God, but neither does all work and no rest. Every week, and every day, is to be a balance between the two.

How does rest glorify God? Precisely because it doesn’t get anything done. Rest reminds us that we are finite. We tire. We grow weary. We burn out. There is always more to do, but each day, and each week, we reach a point when we have to step away from our work and rest. And in doing so, we are humbled as we are required to place our trust in God, the true provider of all our needs. Rest is intended to draw us to God.

**READ:** End this section on rest for the Lord with the following paragraph in the DDG, emphasizing the need for the gospel to redeem our work today.

When we rest, we reflect the image of the One who created and rested and the One who will provide our final rest one day. Hebrews 4 speaks of a Sabbath rest that remains for God’s people—a rest found in Jesus Christ that will be fully realized upon His return. On that day, we will finally rest from the struggles and labors of our work brought on by sin.

**INSTRUCT:** Ask group members to evaluate the balance of their rest with the second scale in their DDG (p. 22).

Where would you put your rest in the image of God on this scale?

No Rest          Work and Rest in Balance          No Work

**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

How should the image of God in our lives affect our work and rest? (the quality, the how, the why, and the result of our work should reflect and honor God and bless His image-bearers; our rest should be in balance with our work; our rest should be peaceful; our rest should be a true break from work)
**Point 3:** We bear God’s image in how we relate to Him and others (Gen. 2:16-18,21-25).

**READ** Genesis 2:16-18,21-25, asking the group to highlight what is “not good” (DDG p. 23).

16 And the **Lord** God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree of the garden, 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for on the day you eat from it, you will certainly die.” 18 Then the **Lord** God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him.”

21 So the **Lord** God caused a deep sleep to come over the man, and he slept. God took one of his ribs and closed the flesh at that place. 22 Then the **Lord** God made the rib he had taken from the man into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 And the man said:  

This one, at last, is bone of my bone  
and flesh of my flesh;  
this one will be called “woman,”  
for she was taken from man.  
24 This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh. 25 Both the man and his wife were naked, yet felt no shame.

**SAY:** Being created in God’s image sets us apart from the rest of creation in yet another profound way: Humanity alone has the capacity to be in a personal relationship with God.

**FILL IN THE BLANKS:** Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 23).

We bear God’s image and honor our relationship with Him in our **loving obedience** to His commands.

**EXPLAIN:** God created human beings not out of need for Himself but so that we might enjoy the overflow of His love. So our obedience to Him should flow out of loving gratitude, but sin has broken this relationship. Therefore, God sent Jesus Christ, the perfect image of God. He lovingly obeyed the Father perfectly, and when we trust in Him, He restores our relationship with God.

**Commentary:** God did not create people because He was lonely and needed us (He is a Trinity, after all). We were created not to provide relationship for God but instead so that He might provide relationship for us. Honoring this relationship, Adam and Eve were to obey God’s instruction concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for no other reason than God is our good Creator. But they failed and sin entered the world. We still possess the image of God, but again, because of sin, it is distorted and twisted. We are now rebels seeking to disobey God in every facet of our lives. The fall has hindered our capacity to love and obey God, to be in relationship with Him.
Commentary (continued): But as sure as humanity’s nature has been distorted by sin, God had a plan to restore His image that was marred in them. And this plan rested on Jesus, the perfect image of God (John 14:9; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). In Him—in His sinless life of perfect loving obedience and in His death and resurrection—we find the true answer to our fallen state. When we trust in Christ, our sin is forgiven and removed from us, and in its place we are given Christ’s righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). Finally, we once again have the capacity to bear God’s image through relationship with Him.

SAY: While our primary relationship is with God, He designed us to enjoy meaningful relationships with other people as well.

EXPLAIN: The first time God says something is “not good” is when man is isolated (v. 18). So God made Eve to be a helper corresponding to Adam. Here God instituted the first family. It is important to note that this happens before the fall—human relationships are not a concession by God because our sin broke relationship with Him. Rather, God’s plan is for people to give Him glory by how we relate with one another.

- God is not threatened when husbands and wives, parents and children, friends, or church families love and enjoy one another. He is glorified when those He created dwell together in loving, faithful community. But bearing the image of God in our relationships with other people is much more than this.
- We reveal God and point to the gospel just as much with how we love and relate to strangers, outcasts, and enemies (see Matt. 5:43–48). This love is counterintuitive and countercultural because this fallen world creates a multitude of reasons to divide and devalue people. But love joins humanity together.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read the following paragraph in the DDG, connecting our relationship with God to how we relate to others.

God expects His image bearers to honor Him as they relate to other image bearers. When we see human dignity as God defined and designed it, we won’t treat people differently based on who they are. Instead, we will love all—casting aside racism, classism, nationalism, sexism, and any other “–ism” rooted in sin—as we share and model the hope of the gospel with the world.

INTERACT: Read the “Voices from Church History” quote; then ask group members the following question.

In what ways can you bear the image of God in your relationships with others more clearly? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

Voices from Church History

“The Soul of the poorest Beggar that cries at the door for a crust, is in its own nature of equal dignity and value, with the Soul of the most glorious Monarch that sits upon the Throne.”

—John Flavell (1630-1691)
**EXPLAIN:** Our dignity rests in who God created us to be and who we are in Jesus Christ—the image of the invisible God whose perfect work restores our relationship with God and others. This is the message we are to share with the world.

**Commentary:** Understanding that we have been created in God’s image should change the way we view ourselves and others. We have been created for a type of intimate relationship with God that is reserved for humanity alone—this is our source of dignity. And this is a dignity that is inherent. It is God-given; therefore, it cannot be earned or lost.

As the people of God, we are to winsomely affirm dignity everywhere we see it and look for every opportunity to attribute it to our Creator. We affirm the dignity of every person, never seeking to communicate anyone is worth more or less than any other person. We recognize that we have all been created by the same God, have been impacted by the same disease of sin, and can be forgiven of our sin and restored back to God through the same cross of Jesus Christ.

**READ** the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 24), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

Because we are image bearers of God, we reflect His glory in how we steward the earth, work and rest, and cultivate relationships with Him and others.

- **Identify the places in your life where you struggle to bear the image of God well; then pray for forgiveness and help to obey God with joy.**

- **In what ways can your group engage in your community to affirm the inherent dignity of others (e.g., the poor, widows, orphans)?**

- **What relationships will you begin or cultivate with others who need to have their dignity affirmed as image bearers of God? Who need to have their purpose restored through the gospel of Jesus Christ?**

**CLOSE IN PRAYER:** Father, You have made us in Your image so that we can reflect You in this world that You have created. By the work of Your Spirit, transform us and conform us to the perfect image of Your Son, Jesus, so we can fulfill our purpose over creation and our gospel mission to this lost and dying world. Amen.

**INSTRUCT:** As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the Daily Study devotions in their DDG (pp. 25-27), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use Encourage One Another (p. 28) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.
Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The Daily Study devotions in the DDG (pp. 25-27) help group members get into God’s Word for themselves. Encourage One Another (p. 28) helps group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 25-27) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.
- Share the following idea from the devotion for Day 2 as a part of point 2 in the session: The roles God gave us were not an afterthought. He did not create the world followed by people only then to figure out how we would fit within His design. From the very beginning, God’s intention was for people to work in concert with Him to rule over creation.

Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God’s Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- Day 1: “We are to be faithful stewards who value God’s creation and take care of it. And in doing so, we bear well the image of the One who created it all.”
- Day 5: “It is only through Jesus that we can finally be restored with God and discover what it truly means to bear God’s image.”

Visit www.GospelProject.com/blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God’s Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the DDG (p. 28) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using The Gospel Project in their groups.

- Encourage group members to see this time as a way to bear God’s image well, honoring both God and others through fellowship grounded on God’s Word.
- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.
Additional Commentary

**Point 1: We bear God’s image in how we rule over the world (Gen. 1:26-31).**

“Human beings, both male and female, are said to have been made in the image of God (1:26b-27). Thus humans are different from other created beings like animals, and this fact has important consequences for how we live. First of all, it means that every human being resembles his or her Creator in some way. Consequently, every human being is special and important. We should be able to recognize the Creator in the men and women we see around us. Second, it means that we should not worship any animal (Ex. 20:4; Rom 1:21-22). Woe to the person who lowers himself to the level of animals by giving an animal or an image of an animal the place that belongs only to the Creator! Third, because God created both our bodies and our spirits, we must not artificially separate the two and think that we can ignore our bodies while living to God in our spirits. Scripture makes it plain that we must not mistreat our own bodies or those of others (1 Cor 6:19-20).”

“The importance of the concept of men and women as bearers of God’s image speaks to the dignity and worth of each human being (1:26-27). No one person can be considered more like the Creator than another. In addition, every life, whether in the beginning stages or at the end of days, shares the same value before God. This fact should encourage Christians with two important truths:

- You should seek to protect life at every stage. The assault on human life—whether abortion or euthanasia—is an assault on the concept of mankind as bearers of God’s image because abortion and euthanasia employ a logic that life in the embryonic stage or in the final stage is not as valuable. This lie is from the pit of hell.

- You should never hold to racist beliefs. All humans—not just a certain race—are created in God’s image. Each person equally bears the image of God.”

**Point 2: We bear God’s image in how we work and rest (Gen. 2:1-3,15).**

“God did not create human beings to wander idly round the garden. He gave Adam (and through him all humankind) a purpose. Adam was to work the garden and maintain it (2:15). Today, we associate the task of caring for a large garden or a farm with backbreaking labour, but that only became true after the fall. At creation, Adam was given the privilege and responsibility of working for God in the location where he had been placed. The same is true of us today.”
“The overall picture of Eden…suggests that the park-like garden is part of a divine sanctuary. The man is put in the garden to work it and keep it [2:15]. The term ‘work’ (Hb. ‘abād; cf. v. 5; 3:23; 4:2,12; Prov. 12:11; 28:19) denotes preparing and tending, and ‘keep’ (Hb. shamar) adds to that idea. Since this command comes before Adam sinned, work did not come as a result of sin, nor is it something to be avoided. Productive work is part of God’s good purpose for man in creation. Later, the same two verbs are used together of the work undertaken by the priests and Levites in the tabernacle (‘minister’ or ‘serve’ [Hb. ‘abād] and ‘guard’ [Hb. shamar]; e.g., Num. 3:7-8; 18:7). The man’s role is to be not only a gardener but also a guardian. As a priest, he is to maintain the sanctity of the garden as part of a temple complex.”

Point 3: We bear God’s image in how we relate to Him and others (Gen. 2:16-18,21-25).

“The symbolic significance of the ‘rib’ is that the man and woman are fit for one another as companions sexually and socially. The body metaphor is employed by Paul in his writings to indicate respective roles in community, especially speaking of Christ and the church (1 Cor. 12:21-25; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15-16; Col. 2:19). In Eph. 5:22-31 he draws on the ‘head-body’ imagery in a domestic metaphor where the husband as ‘head’ of the wife parallels Christ as ‘head’ of the church (cp. 1 Cor. 11:3). Paul’s quotation of Gen. 2:24 shows that Eph. 5:28-30 is an allusion to Gen. 2:22-23. It would seem that Paul had appealed to the woman as man’s ‘rib’ to indicate their loving unity, not their domestic equality. This is the significance of the ‘rib’; they are of the same human ‘stuff.’”

“Helper as his complement [2:18] (Hb ‘ezer kenegdo, lit ‘helper corresponding to what is in front of him’) conveys the sense of a helper ‘suitable’ or ‘comparable’ to man. This word ‘ezer’ is never used to describe the man in his relationship to the woman. However, the same word is used to describe God’s relationship to mankind (Ex. 18:4; Deut. 33:7; Ps. 54:4). The word implies neither superiority nor inferiority; it is not about worth. Rather, it is a descriptive of function. You do not lose worth in becoming a helper to someone. In fact, the function suggests the development of an endearing and productive relationship.”

References
For a story to be great, it must include a great beginning. The story of the Bible, which tells the true story of our world, is no exception.

In the Book of Genesis, we see God the Creator in all His majesty and goodness as He spins the world into motion and lavishes His image bearers with love. We have an “inciting incident” that introduces conflict into this good world, as the first humans raise their fists in defiance toward their loving Father and bring havoc into this peaceful paradise. But even here, we have a promise—God will make things right again. God will cover His people’s sins and crush their adversary. The rest of Genesis shows how even though sin spread throughout the world, God remained faithful to His promise to Eve, His promise to Noah, and His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Book of Genesis is a glorious and earthy tale of rebellion and redemption, of sin and salvation, of failings and faith. Here is a book that shows us who we are in our sin and who God is in His grace. May this study lead you to express gratitude for God’s love toward you and then extend His love to everyone who inhabits this world He has promised to restore.