

September 16

Lesson 3 (NIV)

GOD CREATES PEOPLE

DEVOTIONAL READING: [Psalm 103:1–5, 11–14](#)

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: [Genesis 1:26–2:7](#)

[GENESIS 1:26–31](#)

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image,

in the image of God he created them;

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 in the sea and the birds in the sky 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 in the sky and all the creatures that move along 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.

[GENESIS 2:4–7](#)

⁴ This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.

⁵ Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, ⁶ but streams came up from

the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. ²Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

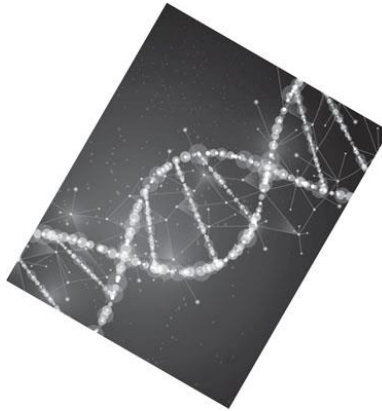


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KEY VERSE

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.—[Genesis 1:27](#)

GOD'S WORLD AND GOD'S PEOPLE

Unit 1: God Creates the World

LESSONS [1–5](#)

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify aspects of the image of God in humanity.
2. Contrast biblical with nonbiblical notions of the nature of humanity.
3. Express one way he or she will honor the dominion mandate.

LESSON OUTLINE

[Introduction](#)

[A. Identity Crisis](#)

[B. Lesson Context](#)

[I. Plan for Humans \(GENESIS 1:26–31\)](#)

A. God's Image (vv. 26, 27)

Children of Promise

B. God's Blessing (v. 28)

C. God's Provision (vv. 29, 30)

Because God Said

D. God's Assessment (v. 31)

II. Life for the First Human (GENESIS 2:4-7)

A. Absence of Water and Man (vv. 4, 5)

B. Presence of Water and Man (vv. 6, 7)

Conclusion

A. Identity Confirmed

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Augustine **Aw**-gus-teen or Aw-gus-tin.

Elohim (*Hebrew*) El-oh-*heem*.

euthanasiayoo-thuh-**nay**-zhuh.

Nyssa **Nee**-sah.

Rafflesia arnoldii Reh-*flee*-zhuh ar-*nol*-dee-eye.

sequoiasih-*kwoi*-uh.

Yahweh (*Hebrew*) *Yah*-weh.

Introduction

A. Identity Crisis

In the mid-twentieth century, psychologist Erik Erikson coined the term “identity crisis” to describe a developmental issue that occurs during adolescence. That phrase has since been used to describe the common plight of people wrestling with the questions “Who am I?” and “Why am I here?” The early theologian Augustine of Hippo (AD 354–430) addressed this issue as he prayed, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you” ([Confessions 1.1](#)).

Augustine’s words reflect the biblical texts we are exploring today. [Genesis 1:26–31](#) and [2:4–7](#) teach us that God created people in his image at the apex of his creation. As his image bearers, we are precious in God’s sight, having received an extraordinary status and role within creation.

B. Lesson Context

The first [25](#) verses of [Genesis 1](#) narrate concisely God’s forming of the cosmos through his spoken word. In successive days, God created light ([1:3–5](#)); the sky ([1:6–8](#)); the seas and dry land ([1:9–13](#)); the sun, moon, and stars ([1:14–19](#)); living creatures that inhabit the water and the sky ([1:20–23](#)); and land animals ([1:24, 25](#)). The text’s focus throughout is on the planet Earth, either directly or indirectly.

The recounting of the first through fourth days in Genesis grows longer with successive days. A reversal of sorts occurs with the fifth day of creation, as the narration becomes shorter ([Genesis 1:20–23](#)). The narration then lengthens dramatically to relate what happens on the sixth day: creation of land animals and people. By allotting only two verses to the creation of land animals on this day ([1:24, 25](#)), the author (Moses) appears in a hurry to get to his focus: the creation of humanity ([1:26–31](#)). Not included in the record are any blessings or commands God gave the land animals to multiply, as he had done to creatures of the air and sea in [1:22](#); compare [8:17](#)).

The author presents God’s seeing the creation of land animals as “good” even though, like on day three, he has not finished describing the creations of the day. God has created some good things during the sixth day, but there is more and greater yet to come.

I. Plan for Humans

([GENESIS 1:26–31](#))

The focus of the narrative up to [Genesis 1:26](#) has narrowed from the vast universe God created to things of the planet Earth specifically. The pace of the narrative now seems to slow down as the author narrates the pinnacle of creation.

A. God’s Image (vv. [26, 27](#))

[26a](#). Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness,

Something new and significant is happening as God now speaks in a new manner. Up to this point, his words on each new day have begun with “Let there be ...” ([Genesis 1:3, 6, 14](#)) or “Let the ...” ([1:9, 11, 20](#),

[24](#)). But now his creation declaration is more reflective in nature: *Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.*

Many new-covenant believers have understood these plural pronouns as trinitarian in nature. But the original audience lacked the revelation we have to understand them that way. The Old Testament is essentially silent on the triune nature of God.

It is the New Testament record that ultimately reveals God as being three-in-one ([John 1](#); etc.). That record will make it possible for believers in the first century and later to contemplate a plurality in the oneness of God's essence (compare [Deuteronomy 6:4](#); [Isaiah 44:8](#); [45:5](#), [14](#)).

That leaves open the question of how the earliest readers interpret the plural pronouns. One proposal is that God is speaking to angelic beings in his heavenly court. Another view is that the plurals are to be understood as a "plural of majesty" by which God refers to the fullness of his power and identity. An illustration of this type of plural is the quotation "We are not amused," supposedly uttered by Queen Victoria after hearing a story that was not as funny as the storyteller thought it to be (compare [Genesis 11:7](#); [Isaiah 6:8](#)).

An enduring issue is determining what it means to be created in God's image, in his likeness. That the words *image* and *likeness* refer to different things is unlikely. First, there is no *and* between *image* and *likeness* in the original text. Second, the same Hebrew words translated *image* and *likeness* appear in [Genesis 5:3](#) to refer to the same thing. Thus the two words should be seen as synonyms combined to add intensity.

It is problematic to identify the image of God with one of God's specific qualities. God is complex, so his image must also be complex. But we are able to get a better grasp if we approach the topic from two angles: those of *form* and *content*.

The form of the image of God is personhood. This speaks to the intellectual, volitional, moral, creative, and religious capacities that animals do not have. As God exercises his creative will, so also human beings alone among earth's creatures have the ability to think of complex things that don't exist, then take deliberate steps to make them a reality. A beaver may go through a sequence of steps to make a dam, but stacking a pile of sticks is not the same as building a hospital!

Content, for its part, speaks to relationship with God (in terms of servants-in-fellowship) and relationship to the world (in terms of dominion-in-stewardship). It is the form part of the image that makes the content part of the image possible.

Regarding the servant aspect, the portrayal of God in the creation narrative highlights a certain correspondence between humans and God that allows us to have a relationship with him. Regarding the dominion part of the content part of the image, that's addressed in our next verse.

[26b](#). "so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."



Visual for Lesson [3](#). Start a discussion by pointing to this visual as you pose the What Do You Think? question on this page.

God bids us to rule over his creation. David will reflect further on this centuries later in [Psalm 8:6–8](#). In creating, the Lord worked and exercised dominion, and he invites us to participate with him in exercising that dominion as we ourselves work. This is an issue of stewardship. (On understandings of *livestock* and *creatures that move along the ground*, see commentary on [Genesis 1:24](#) in lesson [2](#).)

[27](#). So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

The image of God in which humanity is created includes *male and female*. That we exist in community reflects the communal nature of God that we see taught more clearly in the New Testament. The Father, Son, and Spirit are one, yet they are clearly distinct persons. And though male and female together form one humanity, there is a clear, God-intended distinction between male and female.

God’s statement identifying us as being in his image points to humanity’s exalted place. Some students also see the triple-usage of the verb *created* as significant. The word in the original language being translated thus occurs only eight times between [Genesis 1:1](#) and [5:1](#), and fully half of those are connected with the final and most significant aspect of creation: the creation of God’s image bearers (three times here and once in [5:1](#)).

It is difficult to overstate the significance of “the image of God” within Judeo-Christian ethics. Without the belief that humans are morally endowed creations of a morally good God, there is nothing to ensure the dignity and value of any and every person—born or unborn, healthy or ill.

Whatever value humans possess comes from the sovereign Creator, to whom we are accountable and responsible. The physical, economic, social, and cultural criteria by which secular humanism establishes and defends personhood are arbitrary, changing, and unreliable. Christians must shape their response to moral issues such as abortion, euthanasia, and racism on the foundation of humanity’s value and special status of being made in the image of God.

What Do You Think?

How will being created in God’s image affect how you treat people you dislike?

Digging Deeper

Which New Testament passages do you find most helpful in that regard? Why?

CHILDREN OF PROMISE

An online search of “baby names” produces over 33 million results. Expectant parents the world over eagerly hunt for the ideal name for their new arrival (or arrivals). Emma, Olivia, Ava, Caleb, Liam, Noah ... To this eagerness is added the anxiety with regard to the various uncertainties that parents-to-be experience.

Given the fact that God has emotions ([Numbers 22:22](#); [Psalm 59:8](#); etc.), have you ever wondered what he was experiencing when he was ready to announce the arrival of his first children, the first humans? Scripture does not give us the backstory details, but the written account of creation does declare the achieved ideal after the fact of creation.

God had hardwired divine values into the first people, and those innate values are passed down to all humans, including us today (see [Romans 1:18, 19; 2:15](#)). Christians are “heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ” ([Romans 8:17](#)). We are the “children of promise” ([Galatians 4:28](#)). What a reason to rejoice in “the riches of [God’s] glorious inheritance in his holy people” ([Ephesians 1:18](#))!

—B. L.

B. God’s Blessing (v. 28)

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

God’s blessing-command spoken over humanity reflects what he has already spoken over creatures of sea and sky ([Genesis 1:22](#)). It resembles a number of other fruitfulness-blessing statements found throughout this book ([9:1, 7; 17:20; 28:3; 35:11; 48:4](#)). Together these demonstrate that rearing children is an integral part of God’s plan for humanity. God desires that the whole earth be inhabited ([Isaiah 45:18](#)) and experience his glory ([40:5; 42:10–13](#)).

To the notion of “ruling over,” or dominion, used earlier, God now adds the verb *subdue*. The word in the original language appears elsewhere in a positive sense in contexts of order and security resulting from the subjugation of enemies ([Numbers 32:20–22; 1 Chronicles 22:18](#); etc.). It also occurs in a negative sense of bondage and enslavement ([2 Chronicles 28:10; Jeremiah 34:11](#)). All this suggests that the focus is the idea of control. Those who are granted this control are, naturally, accountable to God for stewardship in ordering and developing the resources available.

What has come to be called “the dominion mandate” forms a basis for science and technology; it should never be thought a license for careless and abusive use of natural resources. We exercise dominion only as the image or representatives of God in the world, not as creation’s owners. Because we don’t own creation ([Psalm 95:5](#)), we have no right to exploit it in such a way that brings discredit on God. We should exercise the responsibility toward the environment that God expects (contrast [Deuteronomy 20:19, 20](#)

with [2 Kings 3:18, 19](#); God's expectations are different because of subsequent uses anticipated for the resources).

The extent to which we are able to exercise this dominion is now limited because of sin (see lesson [5](#)). However, Christ, who is the image of the invisible God ([2 Corinthians 4:4](#); [Colossians 1:15](#)), has come as the last Adam to achieve dominion ([1 Corinthians 15:22, 45–49](#); compare [Hebrews 2:5–18](#)). In him we have put on the new self and are growing into the image and likeness of God ([Colossians 1:15](#); [3:9, 10](#)).

What Do You Think?

What steps should you take to determine your responsibilities in the stewardship of God's creation?

Digging Deeper

What resources will you consult for understanding those responsibilities?

C. God's Provision (vv. [29, 30](#))

[29, 30](#). 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. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

The repetition of *every* highlights the fact that God is the faithful and generous provider of sustenance to both man and animals. Humans will eat from *seed-bearing* plants and *fruit* trees, and animals will consume *every green plant*. After the flood, people will receive authority from God to eat animal flesh as well ([Genesis 9:3](#)), a new source of protein.

What Do You Think?

How will awareness of God's generosity result in one specific change in the way you live?

Digging Deeper

At what times are you more aware of God's generosity than at others? Why? Explain your answer in light of [Proverbs 22:9](#); [Matthew 5:45](#); [20:1–16](#); and [2 Corinthians 9:6–15](#).

BECAUSE GOD SAID

The largest flower in the world, the *Rafflesia arnoldii*, can reach three feet in diameter. In California's Sequoia National Park, the giant redwoods stretch up to 280 feet in height. We can trace all the features of our planet's vegetation back to two words: "God said."

With an exacting "God said," sky, land, and seas stood to attention. Plants and trees took root in God's care. Seed-bearing plants and fruit trees flourished. God had already planned their purposes and futures, including those of the enormous *Rafflesia arnoldii* and giant redwoods. Better yet, he planned the ideal purpose and future of his children.

When the timeless Creator spoke the world's first foliage into life, he had already pictured not only their ranges of sizes and features, but ours as well. The Creator knows all the details of each person's being, having tenderly formed us in our mothers' wombs ([Psalm 139:13](#)). What a joy to know that above all plants and animals, we are precious in his sight!

—B. L.

D. God's Assessment (v. [31](#))

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

God had previously assessed elements of creation as “good” ([Genesis 1:4](#), [10](#), [12](#), [18](#), [21](#), [25](#)). He now evaluates his creation in light of the addition of humanity, and he pronounces it *very good*. This serves to express God's excitement and invites the reader also to view creation from God's perspective. Creation, before the intrusion of human sin in [Genesis 3](#), fully reflected God's intent. Humanity now awaits the new heavens and new earth, to appear when God's redemptive purposes, initiated in the work of Christ, are consummated ([Revelation 21:1–5](#)).

II. Life for the First Human

([GENESIS 2:4–7](#))

The intervening text not included in today's lesson summarizes what God does on the seventh day: nothing! He rests from his work.

A. Absence of Water and Man (vv. [4](#), [5](#))

[4](#). This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

We come to what many characterize as a second account of the creation of man. This section, however, is better thought of as a more detailed account of what [Genesis 1](#) described in the format of panorama.

The phrase *this is the account of* is a formulaic section-header (compare [Genesis 5:1](#); [10:1](#); [11:10](#); [25:12](#), [19](#); [36:1](#), [9](#); [37:2](#)). This introductory statement carries the sense of “This is what happened concerning ...”

A feature of the Bible, first occurring in the verse before us, is the use of the divine name *Yahweh*; this is traditionally rendered, in small capitals, as LORD in our English Bibles. Previously, God has been called only by the Hebrew name *Elohim*, a title conveying his transcendence and power. The name *Yahweh*, on the other hand, emphasizes his eternal existence and covenantal presence with his people. The combined name—seen three times in [Genesis 2:4–7](#) and dozens of times elsewhere as “LORD God”—is thus particularly powerful.

What Do You Think?

How might the doubled name “Lord God” influence how you relate to him?

Digging Deeper

Does the triple designation “Lord God Almighty” in [Revelation 4:8](#); [11:17](#); [15:3](#); [16:7](#); [21:22](#) change your answer? Why, or why not?

5. Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground,

The language here suggests that the writer is not looking back to the creation of vegetation in [Genesis 1](#), but rather is previewing the cultivation that will occur in the Garden of Eden and after the fall. Two features lend support for this view. First, the word *plant* appears again in [Genesis 3:18](#) to designate what humanity will eat after the fall. Second, whereas the *rain* anticipated in verse 5 will be a blessing, it is an instrument of judgment in Noah’s day ([7:4](#)). These verses thus may set the stage for the more detailed account of man’s creation that follows, which complements the general description in [1:26](#), [27](#).

B. Presence of Water and Man (vv. [6](#), [7](#))

6, 7a. but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground

The exact nature of the *streams* that *came up from the earth* is unclear. The underlying Hebrew word occurs in the Old Testament only here and in [Job 36:27](#), where it is also translated “streams.” The idea may be that of evaporated water that condenses to a liquid state to water *the whole surface of the ground*. Perhaps the water mixed with *dust* provides clay that *the Lord God* uses to create man (compare [Job 10:9](#); [33:6](#); [Isaiah 45:9](#); [Romans 9:21](#)).

The sound of the Hebrew word for *man*, which is *Adam* ([Genesis 2:19](#)), resembles closely the word for *ground*. Thus the lofty image of being created in God’s likeness ([1:26](#)) is now tempered with the reality of what constitutes the human body, its humble origin. “The first man was of the dust of the earth” ([1 Corinthians 15:47](#)).

7b. and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,

Some have proposed that for God to breathe *the breath of life* into the man is to place a tiny portion of God’s very own essence into a human. This is wrong. When [2 Peter 1:4](#) says that we “participate in the divine nature,” the meaning is that we share in those attributes of God that he grants us as his image bearers (example: [1 Peter 1:15](#), [16](#)). No part of our essence as humans is uncreated.

7c. and the man became a living being.

Some older translations have “living soul” here, perhaps leading one to believe that it is at this point that the first human receives that element of his nature that sets him apart from the animals. But the original language behind the translation *became a living being* is identical in the descriptions of other creatures in [Genesis 1:20](#), [24](#), [30](#); [2:19](#)). We are indeed a combination of physical and spiritual ([Matthew 10:28](#)), but that fact cannot be established from this verse.

Conclusion

A. Identity Confirmed

The following is attributed to Gregory of Nyssa (AD 335–395) in a treatise he wrote entitled “On the Creation of Man.”

In this world I have discovered the two affirmations that man is nothing and that man is great. If you consider nature alone, he is nothing and has no value; but if you regard the honor with which he has been created, man is something great.

Christians should view themselves and others as special creations of God and objects of his love and concern. Because all are made in our Lord’s image, all deserve respect, dignity, honor, and care, regardless of social status, accomplishments, etc. Moreover, as God’s image bearers, our work is a cooperative enterprise with him. Our work is exalted, holy, and spiritual. May we treat it as such!

What Do You Think?

What will the expression “of Christ, who is the image of God” in [2 Corinthians 4:4](#) motivate you to do differently in the week ahead? Why?

Digging Deeper

Consider how we are like and unlike Christ as image bearers.

B. Prayer

Father, we praise you as ones having been formed in your image, unique and loved. Grant us to see the value you have already bestowed abundantly on us and others. Give us eyes to see the stewardship we have from you in our work. We pray this in the name of the one into whose image you are transforming us—our Lord Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Live up to the meaning of [Romans 8:29](#).

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student

Into the Lesson

Display the letters *E, E, L, O, P, P*. Ask learners to suggest as many words as they can create; jot responses on the board.

When responses are no longer forthcoming, say, “Creating these words was probably easy for most of you, as easy as it was for God to take elements of his creation and bring *people* into existence. In creating words from random letters, you demonstrate you share an attribute of God, having been made in his image: the ability to form words. Let’s explore further the idea of being made in God’s likeness.”

Into the Word

Recruit four students to read the text aloud: two to alternate verses of [Genesis 1:26–31](#) and two to do the same with [2:4–7](#). Then pose this question for whole-class discussion: *What does it mean and not mean to be created in the image of God, in his likeness?* Jot responses on the board. After a few minutes, offer these observations: “We should not identify the image of God with one specific quality. God is complex, so his image must also be complex. The core concept in an image, or likeness, is correspondence. God created someone who would correspond to and relate to him in ways other elements of creation cannot. A likeness is in some sense a similarity, but it is not an exact duplicate.”

After summarizing the issues of form and content of the image from page [27](#) ask, “Do these factors cause you to modify your responses or add to them?” Encourage free discussion. (Expect responses that address the abilities to exercise creative willfulness, language, moral discernment, etc.) Request clarification and Scripture backup where appropriate. (*Option*. This can be a small-group discussion.)

Option. Distribute copies of the “In His Own Image” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work individually for not more than one minute to complete. Then call time and discuss.

Next, divide the class in half and give each group a handout (you create) with one of the following summary statements of an ancient school of philosophy. Have group members compare and contrast the view with the text for today.

Epicurean Group: Modest pleasure, meaning the absence of bodily pain and troubles of the soul, is the end and aim of life. *Stoic Group*: Freedom from suffering through being objective and exercising clear judgment is the purpose of life.

If your class is larger than eight learners, form more groups and give duplicate assignments. Have group spokespersons summarize how their philosophical summary contrasts with today’s text. Point out the interaction between Paul and advocates of these philosophies in [Acts 17:18–34](#). Wrap up by quoting [Colossians 2:8](#).

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Potter and Clay” activity from the reproducible page. Have learners complete as indicated.

Into Life

Say, “God has told humanity to rule over other earthly creatures. What are some synonyms for the phrase *rule over*? (Possible responses: control; exercise dominion, jurisdiction, authority, etc.) Ask, “How does the dominion mandate apply to you personally?”

After a time of personal sharing, give each learner an index card (you prepare) on which appears the following:

My dominion over animals and plant life implies that I should . So to glorify God and submit obediently to him, I will .

Suggest that learners place this card where they will see it daily in the week ahead.