



What it Means to be Human

A series of 6 studies on Genesis 1 to 11

Study 1 – Created in God's Image

Study 2 – In Partnership

Study 3 – Fallen

Study 4 –

Study 5 – Redeemed

Study 6 – Including God

Study 1: What it Means to be Human: Created in God's Image

1. What makes for a good opening chapter of a book?

2. Read Genesis 1:1-2:3

What characters are introduced to us here?

What do we learn about each one?

What does the stage look like?

Given what we read here, what are we expecting to see as the story unfolds?

3. Read again 1:26-28

What is unique about human beings?

What exactly does being created in God's image entail?

4. Do you ever think of yourself as reflecting the image of God?

How does this fact inform our (a) sense of self-worth, and (b) our attitude to work?

5. Think back through history and identify some moments when society has failed to recognise God's image within humanity. Are there other moments when we've got it right?

When are you tempted to forget that certain people are made in the image of God?

6. Read Colossians 1:15-19. What does this passage add to the information contained in Genesis 1?

7. According to Colossians 1:15-19, how is Jesus central to fulfilling our task as being image bearers of God?

8. Spend some time praying that the Holy Spirit might renew us so that we might reflect God's image accurately and winsomely.

Study 2: What it means to be human: In partnership

1. What was the best team experience you've ever had? What made it great?
2. Read Genesis 2:4-25. How would you describe God's relationship with the humans? Point out the verses which form your response.
3. What about the humans' relationship with the animals?
4. What job description do we have as humans here these first chapters of Genesis?
5. As a spouse, how is Eve described in v20?
6. Drawing on your responses to the above two questions, what implications can we draw for the purpose of marriage? How does this Biblical view of marriage fit with our society's view?
7. Read vs 21-25 again. How is Adam's response to Eve different to his response to the animals? What can Adam teach us about how a man ought to respond to his wife?
8. Read Mark 10:1-12. How does Jesus apply the information about men and women in Genesis chs 1 & 2?
9. What about people who aren't married? What does the Bible say about their relationships? See Deuteronomy 14:28-29, James 1:27, Matthew 19:8-12.
10. Pray that God might help us understand and commit to his vision for human partnerships.

Study 3: What it Means to be Human: Fallen - Genesis 3

1. Imagine you are a young alien from another planet and you had to complete a school project on the human race. What positive things might you observe, and what negative things might you say?
2. Read Genesis 3:1-7. What strategy does the serpent use to fool Eve?
3. How do we see that strategy at work today?
4. Read Genesis 3:8:13. As a result of Adam and Eve's actions, what happens to:
 - a. God's relationship with humanity;
 - b. Adam and Eve's relationship with each other?
5. Read Genesis 3:14-20. How do these verses explain what we experience in the world?
6. How is this explanation different to what we might hear from others as they try and explain the world?
7. Given what we have seen in Genesis so far, how might we answer those who say:
 - a. "I can't help the way I am. It's how God made me"
 - b. "I have hope in humanity because human beings are ultimately good"
8. What hope does this Chapter leave us with? (look especially at v15 and v21).
9. How does the New Testament expand upon the hints of hope contained in Genesis 3? (Hint: look at Romans 5:18-19, Romans 16:20, 1 Corinthians 15:21-22).
10. Spend some time praying that, together with those around us, we might not be fooled as to our fallen human condition. Thank God that in Jesus we have a cure!

Study 5: What it means to be human: Redeemed

1. What are the world's main problems? How would secular people say these problems can be dealt with?
2. Read Genesis 6:9-22. In 6:5 (cf. Mark 7:20-23) what does God say is wrong with the humanity? What is the basis of the problem and what effect does this have in society (6:11)?
3. If you were God how would you deal with this problem, what are your options?
4. Why does God send a flood? What does this show us about God? What is your reaction to God's action?
5. How does 6:9 describe Noah? What does this mean?
6. What does God do to rescue Noah (Read also Genesis 8:1 and 8:15-9:3)? What does this rescue show us about God?
7. How does the Noah story point forward to what God will do in the New Testament (see John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:1-9)? What is the result of God's redemption for Noah and for us?
8. Does the flood solve the problem with humanity (see Genesis 8:20-21)? How does God deal with the problem of the human heart (Ezekiel 36:26; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; 1 John 3:2)?

Study 6: What it means to be human: Including God

1. What is your reaction if someone asks you to do something you don't want to do? How do you feel when someone doesn't do what you ask? For example, you ask them to meet you somewhere and they don't turn up.

Read Genesis 11.1-9

2. What are the two reasons the people in Shinar built the city and the tower (v4)? Is being scattered always a bad thing (read Genesis 1.28 and 9.1)?
3. If God is everywhere, why does he "come down" to see what the Babylonians were doing (verse 5)?
4. What is God's goal in confusing the Babylonians' language (verse 6)?
5. Why does having different languages mean that they can't continue the building project (verse 8)? What things does having different languages make difficult today?

Read Acts 2.1-13

6. Why do you think it's so important that the disciples were able to speak different languages (verse 4)?
7. Why do you think it's so important that the devout Jews heard the disciples speaking in their languages (verses 5 to 11, especially verse 11), rather than them understanding a foreign language?
8. In Genesis, the Babylonians were united by a common language to build a city. What common thing unites the disciples in Acts? What does this say about God's idea of unity?

Leaders Guide

Study 1: What it Means to be Human: Created in God's Image

1. What makes for a good opening chapter of a book?

The idea is to appreciate Genesis Ch 1 as the opening chapter of a larger narrative: the story of God and his people in the world he created! Any good book opening tells us of the characters and the setting, and of the story that is going to unfold.

2. Read Genesis 1:1-2:3

What characters are introduced to us here?

What do we learn about each one?

What does the stage look like?

Given what we read here, what are we expecting to see as the story unfolds?

God is the main character; look how many times he is mentioned in the text. Human beings are important too; made on the final day of creation, they are the pinnacle of God's creative endeavors. Some people might say that the inanimate items that God has created are 'characters'. Well, they are not beings like God and humans are, but Romans 1 will say how we exchange the glory of the creator for the things he created, so we humans can treat them as important 'characters' when in fact they are tools put there to give God glory and to help us humans. We expect to see the story unfold of how God and humanity and the world all interact together.

3. Read again 1:26-28

What is unique about human beings?

Made on the last day, humans are the pinnacle of creation. But we are still part of creation, so dependent upon God. We are the only things in creation that are in God's image. We reflect something of God himself! Therefore humans are incredibly precious, not just one more piece of biology.

What exactly does being created in God's image entail?

Bearing God's image involves ruling creation (v26, 28). It also involves living in relationship with one another (v27, 28). Both these things reflect something of God, in that he rules the world and is relational in nature.

4. Do you ever think of yourself as reflecting the image of God?

How does this fact inform our (a) sense of self-worth, and (b) our attitude to work?

(a) we are precious and valuable and reflect something of the divine.

(b) part of bearing God's image is exercising rule and dominion over the earth. This is what many of our jobs are actually about; not just about making money or being occupied, but about bringing order to the world.

5. Think back through history and identify some moments when society has failed to recognize God's image within humanity. Are there other moments when we've got it right?

Where we've got it wrong: slavery, apartheid, genocide, sexism. We got it right with the end of slavery, with civil rights, suffrage.

When are you tempted to forget that certain people are made in the image of God?

Whenever we feel like ripping someone to shreds, belittling them or insulting them what we are actually doing is disrespecting the image of God. Point people to James 3:9 which makes this very point.

6. Read Colossians 1:15-19. What does this passage add to the information contained in Genesis 1?

Jesus was actually active in the process of creation. Things are created for him, things are actually held together in him (v17).

7. According to Colossians 1:15-19, how is Jesus central to fulfilling our task as being image bearers of God?

He is the image bearer par excellence. God's fullness dwells in him. So if we want a good model to copy in order to fulfill our task as image bearers, then he's the guy to look to.

Also note how Paul points out that Jesus is the one reconciling us to the Father. Over the next few weeks we'll see that because of sin, the image we present is somewhat distorted and in need of renewal. While Paul doesn't really use image-restoring language here to describe the atonement (he uses friendship language, ie 'reconciliation'), we do see Jesus as the key to overcoming sin, which means he is the key to overcoming the distorted image. Knowing Christ as savior is a key step to getting our image bearing right.

It may be worth reflecting on the following passages which speak of how Christian people are in the business of reflecting a renewed image of God: 1 Corinthians 15:49; 2 Corinthians 3:18 (note role of Holy Spirit), Colossians 3:9-10.

8. Spend some time praying that the Holy Spirit might renew us so that we might reflect God's image accurately and winsomely.

Study 2: What it means to be human: In partnership

1. What was the best team experience you've ever had? What made it great?

A sharing question to get people thinking about what it means to be in partnership together. The theme of today's study is that being a human means working together in a mix of different relationships

2. Read Genesis 2:4-25. How would you describe God's relationship with the humans? Point out the verses which form your response.

Note that God cares and provides in that he seems to plant the garden for humans, (v8) and is concerned about man's need of help in fulfilling the task of looking after creation (v18). Although God still sets boundaries (v16-17), he delegates some responsibility to Adam in the naming of the Animals (v19).

3. What about the humans' relationship with the animals?

Humans have authority over them in that Adam is the one who names them. This "order of relationships" (God>Humans>Animals) is important because in Ch 3 one of the hallmarks of sin is that these relationships are reversed (ie Snake>Humans>God).

4. What job description do we have as humans here these first chapters of Genesis?

We are to work the earth and take care of it. Similar to ch 1:28. Humans have a task to bring order to the world.

5. As a spouse, how is Eve described in v20?

As a helper for Adam. Note the context here is the task at hand of bringing order to the world. The focus is not so much "Adam needs a subordinate", but that "a team is better than one person". That Paul will go on to talk about subordination needs to be understood in this context. He's talking about enabling the team to work well together; it's about roles enabling the aim to be fulfilled rather than reflecting an inherent difference in value between men and women.

Note also that the loneliness of Adam is not a personal "I'm so lonely with no one to talk to" kind of loneliness. It's the loneliness of being set a task without any help.

6. Drawing on your responses to the above two questions, what implications can we draw for the purpose of marriage? How does this Biblical view of marriage fit with our society's view?

Marriage is about enabling humans to get about the task of bringing order to God's world. Marriage ought to produce good things to this end: kids (if physically possible), income that can be shared, stable households that provide shelter for others. It is not about self-fulfillment. If this sounds a little pragmatic and unromantic, then, yes, you've picked up on my desire to take the heat out of our obsession with marriage as an expression of inner desires. Romance and sex serve the bigger goal; they bind the two partners together so their partnership can do the other stuff it's meant to do.

7. Read vs 21-25 again. How is Adam's response to Eve different to his response to the animals? What can Adam teach us about how a man ought to respond to his wife?

When God brings the animals to Adam, the impression we are given is that Adam rejected them. But Eve is a different story. God brings Eve to Adam and he recognizes something similar to himself. Of course, Eve is not exactly the same (our genders are complementary), but notice the emphasis here is on how alike the humans are. Adam sees himself in Eve, and so he values her in a way he hasn't valued the other creatures. Note Paul picks this up in Ephesians 5:28: "He who loves his wife loves himself".

8. Read Mark 10:1-12. How does Jesus apply the information about men and women in Genesis chs 1 & 2?

The unity of a marriage means that marriage ought to last. Note that there may be divorced people in your group, so it might be appropriate to acknowledge that sometimes what is ideal isn't attainable. Maybe point out that the context of this passage is that Jesus is criticizing those who were divorcing for weak reasons (lust etc). It's my opinion that the Bible does permit divorce for some reasons (the three "As": Adultery, Abandonment, Abuse)

9. What about people who aren't married? What does the Bible say about their relationships? See Deuteronomy 14:28-29, James 1:27, Matthew 19:8-12.

Deut and James indicate that widows are to be cared for by the rest of God's people. This indicates that marriage isn't the only relationship that we are to invest in – the members of church ought to be caring for one another. Jesus' comments in Matt 19 are also interesting. He speaks of "eunuchs for the kingdom". Marriage is not necessary, and can even be rejected. A good church community makes this decision easier.

10. Pray that God might help us understand and commit to his vision for human partnerships.

Study 3: What it Means to be Human: Fallen - Genesis 3

1. Imagine you are a young alien from another planet and you had to complete a school project on the human race. What positive things might you observe, and what negative things might you say?

The aim of this study is to have an honest assessment of our condition as human beings. Someone observing us from the outside might find some things to marvel at, but surely they would see our capacity to cause harm to one another as well.

2. Read Genesis 3:1-7. What strategy does the serpent use to fool Eve?

People may ask after the identity of this serpent. The New Testament speaks of Satan as an ancient serpent (point out Rev 20:2). So we're on safe ground to assume that Satan is the one at work here. Whether it is Satan himself in snake form or whether he possessed a snake in the garden, we don't know.

The strategy is to use lies "You will not surely die!"; to cause doubt as to God's instructions "Did God really say?"; to cause doubt as to God's goodness and intentions "God knows you'll become like him!"

3. How do we see that strategy at work today?

We hear lies about God and his word all the time. Arguments are often put up to confuse people about the clarity of God's word, e.g. "Does God really condemn homosexual sex?". Arguments are also put up causing us to doubt God's goodness, e.g. various atheists who label Sunday School work as a form of child abuse.

4. Read Genesis 3:8:13. As a result of Adam and Eve's actions, what happens to:

- (i) God's relationship with humanity;
- (ii) Adam and Eve's relationship with each other?

(i) God wants to meet with Adam and Eve but they hide. Sin makes us want to hide from God.

(ii) Note how Adam blames his wife Eve for his own choice to eat the fruit. They were created as a team, but sin causes a rift to emerge.

5. Read Genesis 3:14-20. How do these verses explain what we experience in the world?

The trials and hardship of life are a product of Adam and Eve's decision. Note there is now tension between the animal kingdom and the humans (v 15). Note tension between the sexes in v16. Note how the environment itself is pitted against Adam from v17; hard work is what we can expect, followed by death (v19).

6. How is this explanation different to what we might hear from others as they try and explain the world?

Some people might say that if we can fix up our environmental problems, then humanity will flourish, or if we get the economy right, or if we can just eradicate poverty, or if we can educate people. Indeed, all these things can do a great deal of good. But the real issue is that we are in a fallen world which is suffering the consequences of sin. Note the story of Jesus and the paralytic in Mark 2; Jesus says "Your sins are forgiven" before he says "Take up your mat and walk" – sin is the bigger problem.

7. Given what we have seen in Genesis so far, how might we answer those who say:

(i) "I can't help the way I am. It's how God made me"

(ii) "I have hope in humanity because human beings are ultimately good"

(i) *This point of view overlooks the effects of sin in the world. Yes, God created us, but God's creation is marred by sin – it is 'fallen', 'broken', 'in need of repair'.*

(ii) *Humans beings can do a lot of good, but sin is a universal condition brought about by the events of Genesis 3. The signs are everywhere: discord between people, rebellion against God's laws, destruction of the environment, disease, etc etc.*

8. What hope does this Chapter leave us with? (look especially at v15 and v21).

V 15 says that in the future the serpent's head will be crushed by one of Eve descendants. The NT (see next question) leads us to understand this verse to be an early reference to the work of Jesus; he will crush Satan and reverse his work.

V 21 sees God acting in a moment of grace towards Adam and Eve. Even though they have sinned, God is providing clothing for them. An early form of sacrifice? Note the clothes are made of skin, so some animal had to die. This , the first reference to death in the Bible, is in the context of God doing something to help the humans he loved and created and to cover the result of their sin.

9. How does the New Testament expand upon the hints of hope contained in Genesis 3? (Hint: look at Romans 5:18-19, Romans 16:20, 1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

Romans 5: Adam's act of sin is matched by Christ's act of righteousness.

Romans 16: A reference to the serpent's head being crushed.

1 Corinthians 15: similar to Rom 5, but the focus is on the death brought by Adam being overcome by the life brought by Jesus (rather than sin overcome by righteousness as in Rom 5)

10. Spend some time praying that, together with those around us, we might not be fooled as to our fallen human condition. Thank God that in Jesus we have a cure!

Study 5: What it means to be human: Redeemed - Genesis 6-9

1. What are the world's main problems? How would secular people say these problems can be dealt with?

Some people will say better education, or a different economic or political system, or better health will deal with the world's problems. Some will say getting rid of religion will remove conflict. The thought is that we are the product of our environment and given the right environment people will be different.

2. Read Genesis 6:9-22. In 6:5 (cf. Mark 7:20-23) what does God say is wrong with the humanity? What is the basis of the problem and what effect does this have in society (6:11)?

The Bible traces the problem to the human heart; our inner nature has become corrupt. We have a bias away from God and tend to serve ourselves.

3. If you were God how would you deal with this problem, what are your options?

Think of various solutions God might be able to use: destroying people and starting again is one, just destroying some people might be another, changing human hearts is another but what would that make people? Could God have sent Jesus in Noah's time? What else could he do?

4. Why does God send a flood? What does this show us about God? What is your reaction to God's action?

Discuss the need for God to be just. What would happen if God didn't punish anyone? Do we think that murderers, child molesters or rapists should be let off with no punishment?

5. How does 6:9 describe Noah? What does this mean?

Saying that he is righteous and blameless does not mean he was sinless. It does say he had a right relationship with God and was certainly one who lived in obedience to God.

6. What does God do to rescue Noah (Read also Genesis 8:1 and 8:15-9:3)? What does this rescue show us about God?

Note that telling Noah about the flood, telling him to build the ark and shutting him into it; then sending the wind to dry the land are all God's actions to save Noah and his family. God could have wiped out everybody but he is a God of mercy.

7. How does the Noah story point forward to what God will do in the New Testament (see John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:1-9)? What is the result of God's redemption for Noah and for us?

The New Testament makes clear that God will judge humanity and that sinners will be destroyed. The salvation we have through Jesus is a rescue from this judgment but also a redemption back into a covenant relationship with God as his children.

8. Does the flood solve the problem with humanity (see Genesis 8:20-21)? How does God deal with the problem of the human heart (Ezekiel 36:26; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; 1 John 3:2)?

8:20-21 makes it clear that human hearts are still corrupt after the flood. The rest of the Old Testament shows this as God's people continually fail him. The Holy Spirit begins the process of transforming us to be more like Jesus but our hearts won't be completely changed until the resurrection.

Study 6: What it means to be human: Including God

1. What is your reaction if someone asks you to do something you don't want to do? How do you feel when someone doesn't do what you ask? For example, you ask them to meet you somewhere and they don't turn up.

This is to get people to think about the mindset of the Babylonians on the one hand (disobedience) and the mindset of God on the other (sovereign plan for humanity).

Read Genesis 11.1-9

2. What are the two reasons the people in Shinar built the city and the tower (verse 4)? Is being scattered always a bad thing (read Genesis 1.28 and 9.1)?

God has previously told humanity to go out into the whole world, but we see here the Babylonians saying no and building their own community without God, based on their own fame - and fear of what it might mean to follow God.

3. If God is everywhere, why does he "come down" to see what the Babylonians were doing (verse 5)?

This is not so much a matter of location (e.g. God is in heaven) but a matter of majesty and how much greater God is than even our greatest achievements.

4. What is God's goal in confusing the Babylonians' language (verse 6)?

Firstly, he punishes them for their rejection of him and reliance only on themselves; secondly, he prevents further evil from springing from their communal anti-God mindset; thirdly, he effects his plan of spreading people throughout the world.

5. Why does having different languages mean that they can't continue the building project (verse 8)? What things does having different languages make difficult today?

Confusion of languages means the Babylonians can no longer communicate with each other. Communication breakdown leads to a breakdown of their working relationship.

Read Acts 2.1-13

6. Why do you think it's so important that the disciples were able to speak different languages (verse 4)?

God has overcome a barrier that might stop them being able to share the gospel with others. Again, God wishes to scatter his people all over the world, but this time with the saving message of Christ.

7. Why do you think it's so important that the devout Jews heard the disciples speaking in their languages (verses 5 to 11, especially verse 11), rather than them understanding a foreign language?

Again, God is overcoming a barrier to the gospel. Now there is no reason for the listeners to think this message is not for them. The gospel is as much theirs to claim for their own as it is for a native Israelite.

8. In Genesis, the Babylonians were united by a common language to build a city. What common thing unites the disciples in Acts? What does this say about God's idea of unity?

The common link here is, of course, Jesus. Acts further tells us that many of those listening to the disciples on this day came to believe the good news of salvation. God's idea of unity is for a people who are scattered all over the globe but who are united by their common love of Christ and faith in him.

Some other useful bits to know that people might ask about:

- a. *the Babylonians used bricks and bitumen instead of stone and cement because of their geography. Being in a wide river valley, there was very little access to stone (which was also used in cement), and so they used brick instead.*
- b. *"reaches to the heavens" is simply a turn of phrase for "very tall" (see Deut 1.28). There is no suggestion here that the Babylonians were seeking to reach heaven or God by this means.*
- c. *The footnote (at least in the NIV) points out the similarity between the name Babel and the Hebrew word for "confused", but the name itself means "gateway of the god". It is not, however, related to the English word "babble", though they sound similar.*