

Who am I and what am I here for?

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[0 : 00] Genesis 1, starting at verse 26. Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

So God created man in his own image. In the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it.

And have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves on the earth. And God said, Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed, that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit.

You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the heavens, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.

And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

[1 : 16] And on the seventh day, God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day, and made it holy. Because on it, God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

Thank you. Who am I? It's a question that people have asked throughout the ages. Poets have written about it, philosophers have talked about it, artists, musicians, psychologists, politicians, have all tried to answer the question of identity.

And it's just as big today, isn't it? People can have to define themselves, particularly in the areas of sexuality or gender. We're male, female, non-binary, gay, straight, trans, we're a person of colour, a person of privilege.

People might do it in their social media profiles. We choose how we want to define ourselves to the world. I'm going to give you some Twitter bios now, and you can have a little guess, see if you can guess who they are.

But this is the little kind of strap line that people put under their profile. So an easy one to start off with. Autistic climate justice activist.

[2 : 28] Born at 325 ppm. Any idea? Yeah. I had to Google what 375 ppm meant.

Apparently it's the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. So that's what it was in the month that she was born. OK, next one. This is a bit trickier.

Live every day as if it's your last, because one day you will be right. So who do you think that's for? Any guesses? I'm just going to grab my water.

It's Piers Morgan. I mean, who would have guessed that? Piers Morgan. OK, another one for you. Living, loving, and working to help you.

OK. Is that where we read that? It's Serena Williams. Yeah, that was quite a surprise to me. Serena Williams.

[3 : 25] You know, tennis player, American tennis player. So, here's another one for you, Rachel, because Andy Murray just simply cuts I play tennis.

So that one is a little bit easier to go for. We usually define ourselves by what we think is important. I wonder how you would define yourself. I might say something like, I'm Tasha, I'm 45, I'm a wife, a mother, I love Jesus, I work for a church, I like playing sports, I love art.

Well, the Bible has a lot to say about who we are, and we're not going to be able to look at everything that it says this morning. I don't know if you remember, for those of you that were on the Women's 24 Hours Away, Lizzie very helpfully took us to Juan Peter where we saw that we were wealthy weirdos.

We've got so much as redeemed children of God with a living hope. But we will be like strangers in this world. Well, this morning we're going to look at the end of the creation story in Genesis 1 and 2 to see what God says about the humans that he created, who we are, and why we're here.

[4 : 38] We're going to think about our identity, our purpose, and our goal in life. So first then, our identity. We're made in God's image. Take a look down at the verses that Katie just read.

you'll see in verse 26, it says, Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps along the earth.

So God created man in his own image. In the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. God said, Let us make man in our image.

Now if you're familiar with the creation story, you'll remember that we get the same phrase in the first six days of creation. So this is why we have those verses printed on the front of the sheet.

You might want to just flip over and have a look. So for example, day one says, And God says, Let there be light.

[5 : 42] And then there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God often then names the things he's made. So for example, he calls a light day and the darkness he calls night. And then we get another repeated refrain.

There was evening, there was morning, the first day. And we have this pattern through the first five days of creation. You'll see down there, day one, let there be light. Day two, let there be an expanse to separate the waters.

Day three, let the waters under the heavens be gathered together in one place and let the dry land appear. Let the earth sprout vegetation. Day four, let there be light from the expanse of the heavens.

And day five, let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures. Now the verses that we read are halfway through day six. So God's just made the animals.

We've had the familiar phrase, let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kind. And it was so. And God saw that it was good. Well here in our verses we don't get let there be or let the earth.

[6 : 42] We get let us make man in our image after our likeness. Us and in our image. So it's not just the image of God the Father it's the image of the triune God.

Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We're told in Genesis 2 sorry, chapter 1 verse 2 of Genesis that the Spirit of God was present and elsewhere in the Bible in Colossians and John for example we're reminded that God the Son who came to earth in the person of Jesus didn't disappear about 1 AD but God the Son existed before the beginning of time.

He was involved in creation. Now it's worth saying here that mankind or man just means mankind or humankind and so all humans therefore are made in the triune God's image his likeness.

Animals were not made in the likeness of God. There is something about humans that is special because we are in the image of God. Just ponder for a moment how amazing that is that the triune God who spoke and things came into being who created all the wonderful things that we see around us day by day he chose to make us as an echo a reflection of him.

Now obviously we're not a perfect reflection that's why we need Jesus. We're more of a distorted one a bit like you might see in the ripples of a pond but when we look around at each other we see a tiny reflection of God.

[8 : 20] Have you ever thought for yourself that way? Next time we feel rubbish about our reflection in the mirror or our performance at work or our abilities as parents just remember that we are made in the image of God.

Isn't that a wonderful thing? but it's also a huge responsibility. Now I think there are a few ways that the Bible tells us that we reflect God and his character and we'll think a little bit about how the jobs that he gives us reflect him in a moment.

But here in verses 26 and 27 we see something of a relational nature by which we reflect God. God is relational within the Godhead and he's created us as relational beings too.

Adam and Eve have a relationship with each other and with God which we'll come back to when we think about our purpose and our goal. Being made in the image of God tells us that every human being matters.

Now obviously some people disagree with that. Professor Stephen Hawking, who is a professor of cosmology at Cambridge University says this, or said this, the human race is just a chemical scum on a moderate sized planet orbiting around a very average star in the outer suburb of one among a hundred billion galaxies.

[9 : 38] Chemical scum. How wrong could he have been? Incidentally, his successor, a guy called, his successor to the chair of cosmology at Cambridge University, a guy called Stephen, sorry, Paul Kellogg, he is convinced that there is a created God and a committed Christian.

The Bible says that we matter, that we are precious. We're made in God's image, every single one of us. And the way that we live confirms that, doesn't it? We only need to look at the way that people responded to the people's death to see that we think that people matter.

I lived in Oxford at one point and I played sport with a guy that was doing a PhD in some science-y thing at the university, I can't quite remember what. And he just believed that we were chemical matter.

And I remember chatting to him and kind of pushing him on what that meant and kind of saying to him basically if we're all chemical matter doesn't that mean that I can just kill you and that would be taken by.

To which he didn't live his beliefs out to logical conclusions. we believe we matter, we matter, we matter, and that's because we do matter.

[10 : 51] We're made in the image of God. So that means that human life is precious. It's far more precious than animals. So while we may care about animal welfare, we should care infinitely more about the welfare of humans.

Every human life, however worthless or disposable society may think it is, is precious in God's eyes. every human life is made in God's image.

And that has implications for how we view others, which we won't have time to exhaust now. But all the isms should disappear, shouldn't they? So racism, ageism, sexism, if all human life is precious in God's eyes, it should not exist.

It should also affect the way that we think about the beginning and end of life. All humans are made in God's image. And God made them male and female. Do you see that in verse 27?

Distinct from each other. So that has implications for the redefinition of gender that we see in society today. Where we find our identity will probably depend on what we value.

[11 : 56] So maybe it's work, or how we look, keeping up to the latest trends. Maybe it's our home, or the appearance of having everything together. Or maybe we find our identity in our children and their successes and failures.

A helpful way to expose where we find our identity might be to ask ourselves, what would I be most sad about if God took it away? So we've seen that humans, or hopefully we see, that humans are made in good image.

And now we're going to see something of the job that humans were given to them. So secondly, should be on your handout, our purpose, we're made to be fruitful and raw.

Or if you want something a little bit more catchy, to fill and to form. So do you see, look down at verses 28 to 30, I've got to read those again for us.

And God blessed them, and God said to them, they're fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

[13 : 06] Mankind is to fill the earth and subdue it. So God is handing over some of his rules to mankind. And I'll just flip back over to the creation story.

You see there in verse 2 that there's a problem. It says there, the earth was without form and void in verse 2. So God gave it all, which we see in the first three days of creation, as he fashioned it, the sky, the sea, and the land.

And then he fills it in the second lot of three days, so days four to six. Day four, he fills the sky with the sun, moon, and stars. Day five, he fills the sea with creatures.

And day six, he fills the land with animals and humans. And then God hands it over to humankind to continue the job of giving it form and ruling it, subduing it, and the job of filling it by procreation.

So in addition to the relational aspect of God's character, this is another way we are in the image of God. We are to fill and form the earth as he did at creation.

[14 : 20] When the queen died last year, it would have been announced the queen is dead, long lived the king. There's never a point when the throne is empty, as it were. But imagine if the queen were really ill before she had died, she might employ a vice-regent, probably Charles, to rule in her place, a bit like Dominic Waugh did when Boris Johnson was hospitalized and paid it.

The vice-regent's job is to rule, to reign, as the king would. Well, we're God's vice-regents. God is not unwell, he is fully reigning, but at creation he handed over some of that responsibility to mankind to rule over the earth.

And that is a remarkable privilege, isn't it? It's also a huge responsibility. Now, we're not Joe Biden or she's seen that, but we will have authority in some area of our lives, even if it's just an area of our home and work.

So it's worth asking ourselves if we're ruling that area in a way that reflects God's character. And God also tells the humans to fill the earth.

The current population is 8 billion, that's so big that I can't quite get my head around it, but I think humans have done their job, the earth is pretty full. But in the New Testament, Jesus seems to take the emphasis away from filling creation and to put it on filling the new creation, what we might call heaven.

[15 : 47] We see that rather than physical children, the focus is now on spiritual children, who can obviously be our physical children as well. Jesus says in Matthew 28 verse 19 when he speaks to his disciples, go therefore and make disciples of all nations.

people. And as we see that happen in the New Testament, the authors frequently use creation language of bearing fruit, growing, water, and lumber in places like Acts and Colossians 1.

And I think that's deliberate, the use of creation language is deliberate to show us that the emphasis is now on telling people about Jesus so that more people can build a new creation. I don't know if you made New Year's resolutions earlier this month.

Social media is utterly jam-packed with motivational slogans or programmes or devices that promise to keep us on track to achieve our goals. I know at least one person doing Dry January, one person doing Veganaury, one friend of mine is doing a six-week sugar plan, which I could possibly take.

One lady I know at the small gate has started to be a life coach who has helped her to identify her three most important values so she can be more authentic to herself.

[17 : 05] So we're constantly being fed the lie that our purpose is to be the best version of ourselves, live our truth to be authentic to us. But that is not our purpose.

Humans were put on this earth to rule over it as God would, being responsible with it, using it for our enjoyment and filling it, which as we now see primarily means filling the new creation, the new heavens and the new earth.

God gave other bits of creation instructions like the sun and the moon and the vegetation, but again with humans there's something different. Do you remember we talked about that repeated refrain, God saw the living skills?

We'll cover it down at verse 31. There's a very similar refrain at the end of each day, but what is different about day six? God saw that it was very good.

With the addition of mankind, God's creation is not just good, it's very good. So mankind is the pinnacle, the high point of creation. I started off by just saying I might describe myself as Patasha, a 45 wife, mum, church worker, netball player, art lover.

[18 : 22] I'm not sure it would go down so well if I said I'm Patasha, I'm made in the image of God, but actually that's a much greater description of who I am. Mankind is the cynical, the high point of creation, but mankind is not the goal of creation.

Our identity is that we're made in God's image, our purpose is that we're to be fruitful and to fill and form the earth. Now we're going to think about that in our goal and our goal is relationship with God. So our goal is we're made for relationship with God. After day six, creation was finished and what did God do? He rested.

Now I don't think that rest means putting your feet up and scrolling Netflix. God was still at work and saving creation. But do you see in verse two of chapter two, God rested from all the work that he had done.

Creation was over. The pinnacle, the high points of creation that can achieve, God had made mankind so he was able to rest. All of God's creation was made by God and all his work and beauty for mankind to enjoy.

[19 : 35] We've recently had a few birthdays in our household and as usual I planned a party, vacate, talked about birthday presents all with the goal to be enjoyed by the birthday God.

And that is a little bit like God in creation. He created the whole world and the whole of the people are doing. Have a look down at verse three of chapter two.

We know the refrain that comes at the end of each day, God saw that it was good and there was evening and there was morning, the first, second, third, fourth, fifth day. Then we had the sixth day, God saw that it was very good, there was evening, there was morning, the sixth day.

Now we've talked about the addition of very, but have a look at day seven. At the end of day seven we get, so God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

What's missing, what's different? Do you notice that there's no evening and no morning? The seventh day has not come to an end. God is still in the seventh day field.

[20 : 43] He is still resting. Now we've already said that this rest isn't inactive. God is still at work in his world. But to understand this more we've got to look at other bits of the Bible to help us to understand how God used rest.

Now in the Old Testament the Israelites were to equate rest with dwelling in the polycyst. And we've been thinking about that a little bit in our sermons on Sundays recently, haven't we, in the book of Numbers.

Numbers. In the New Testament Jesus tells people to come to him to find rest in Matthew 11 and that he's Lord of the Sabbath in Matthew 12. And in the book of Hebrews we see that this rest, both the rest of the promised land and the rest that we can find in Jesus is ultimately a picture of resting with God in the new creation in perfect relationship with him.

if you heard Simon's sermon when he was introducing numbers to us the other week, he took this to Hebrews chapter 4 because it speaks of the rest that the Israelites were looking forward to in the promises.

It should be on your handout. Hebrews chapter 4 9 to 10. Amber, could you just read that for us? I'm just going to read it. So then there remains a Sabbath rest to the people God's rest.

[22 : 04] Whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works, as God did from his. Thank you. So rest is found in salvation through Jesus and we'll experience that partially in this world as we have peace with God, but we'll experience it fully in the new creation when we dwell with God in perfect relationship with him.

At the end of creation God enters that rest, that perfect relationship with his people, Adam, Eve, they and all humans are in the image of God, made to be in relationship with him.

Mankind is the high point of creation, but relationship with God is the goal. relationship with God is the point of our perfect relationship with God is broken.

But remarkably, despite our sin, it's that same offer of rest that is still available to those who trust in Jesus. So right here in Genesis 1, we see God's plan humankind, and that plan is for God, humans, to live in perfect relationship with God.

It's in relationship with God that we will be truly satisfied when we're living his way, in his world, under his rule. Seek them to know you better, and that is when we will be most fully human, because that is why we remain people spend their lives wrestling with the question of who they are and why they're here.

[23 : 45] Some people strive to achieve something notable, to make them wrong. The world around us tells us that we'll be most satisfied and most true to ourselves. Well, our creator God says that he made us for a relationship with him, and that is where we will be most satisfied and most human.