

Session 2: How It Was Designed: God's Design

Passage: Genesis 1:1 (NIV)

¹In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Key Idea: Creator of All Things:

Psalm 33:6 (NIV)

⁶By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,
their starry host by the breath of his mouth.

Everything that we can see, and everything we cannot see has all been created by God. This should move us to worship when we think about just how vast our God is in his power to create.

Discussion Questions:

- How does knowing that God is the creator of all things shape our understanding of the world around us?
- What are some specific ways this knowledge of God as the creator impacts your daily life and choices?

Key Idea: Forming Mankind:

Genesis 1:26-27 (NIV)

²⁶Then 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.

God has created you in his own image! Remember that this means you are created with a unique worth and value for no other reason that God made you in his image. This also means that every person you will ever meet is also made in his image and has that same dignity and value.

Discussion Questions:

- How does being created in God's image affect our self-perception and relationships with others?
- Are there any specific changes you can make in your interactions with others to better reflect this understanding of their worth?

Key Idea: Designed for Life:

John 10:10 (NIV)

¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Despite what the world would try to say, our God wants you to have the best life possible, but the best life, or life to the full is by his design and standards and not by our own.

Discussion Questions:

- What does Jesus mean when he says he came to give us life to the full?
- In what areas of your life are you experiencing fullness, and where might you need to rely on Jesus more to experience that?

Application Questions:

- Do you really believe people are in danger without Jesus as their Savior? Who do you know in your circle of influence (family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, etc..) who is without Jesus? Will you commit to praying for them for the next 30 days as you look for an opportunity to share your testimony and do whatever it takes to share the gospel with them?
- In a sermon in 1873, the great preacher Charles Spurgeon proclaimed, "Every Christian here is either a missionary or an imposter!" Discuss what he meant by that and whether our views (and practices) of evangelism align with the Bible.
- Can you effectively share your testimony (spiritual journey) in a way that points someone to Jesus? Break your group up into smaller groups (if larger) and practice doing so now. Key components include:
 - Before Christ: how you were lost and without hope
 - Gospel Moment: how you came to the end of yourself and called upon the name of Jesus.
 - After Christ: what God has done in your life since you were saved.Every Christian has this testimony and can use it to share the gospel with someone else. Practice it until you can say it under 3 minutes so that you are able to share in normal daily interactions.

Commentary

How It Was Designed: God's Design

Genesis 1:1 (NIV)

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

a. **God created:** This summary statement will be detailed in the following verses, but the Bible simply and straightforwardly declares the world did not create itself or come about by chance. It was created by God who, by definition, is eternal and has always been.

- “It is no accident that *God* is the subject of the first sentence of the Bible, for this word dominates the whole chapter and catches the eye at every point of the page: it is used some thirty-five times in as many verses of the story.” (Kidner)
- If you believe Genesis 1:1, you really have no problem believing the rest of the Bible. The God big enough to have **created the heavens and the earth** is big enough to do all the rest the Bible says that He did and does.

b. **God:** This is the ancient Hebrew word *Elohim*. Grammatically it is a plural word used as if it were singular. The verbs and pronouns used with *Elohim* should be in the plural, but when *Elohim* refers to the LORD God the verbs and pronouns are in the singular.

- Adam Clarke quoted Rabbi Simeon ben Joachi, commenting on the word *Elohim*: “Come and see the mystery of the word Elohim; there are *three degrees*, and each degree by itself *alone*, and yet notwithstanding they are all *one*, and *joined together* in *one*, and are not divided from each other.” Clarke adds: “He must be strangely prejudiced indeed who cannot see that the doctrine of a Trinity, and of a Trinity in unity, is expressed in the above words.”
- Luther on *Elohim*: “But we have clear testimony that Moses aimed to indicate the Trinity or the three persons in the one divine nature” (cited in Leupold).

c. **God created the heavens:** The simple fact of God’s creation is even more amazing when we consider the greatness of God’s universe.

- A typical galaxy contains billions of individual stars; our galaxy alone (the Milky Way) contains 200 billion stars. Our galaxy is shaped like a giant spiral, rotating in space, with arms reaching out like a pinwheel, and our sun is one star on one arm of the pinwheel. It would take 250 million years for the pinwheel to make one full rotation. But this is only our galaxy; there are many other galaxies with many other shapes, including spirals, spherical clusters, and flat pancakes. The average distance between one galaxy and another is about 20 million trillion miles. Our closest galaxy is the Andromeda Galaxy, about 12 million trillion miles away.
- For every patch of sky the size of the moon, if you could look very deep, you would see about a million galaxies.
- But God did all this Himself: *Indeed My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand has stretched out the heavens; when I call to them, they stand up together (Isaiah 48:13)*.
- But God is bigger and greater than all His creation: *Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, measured heaven with a span and calculated the dust of the earth in a measure? (Isaiah 40:12)*.

d. **God created the heavens and the earth:** If **God** created the heavens and the earth, then we must forever put away the idea that anything *happens* by chance. “Chance” merely describes the statistical probability of something happening. *Chance* itself can neither do or perform anything.

- Some intelligent people may fall into this delusion. Jacques Monod, a biochemist, wrote: “Chance *alone* is at the source of every innovation, of all creation in the biosphere. Pure chance, absolutely free but blind, at the very root of the stupendous edifice of evolution.”

- But assigning such power to *chance* doesn't make sense. Chance has no power. For example, when a coin is flipped, the chance it will land heads is 50%; however, *chance* does not make it land heads. Whether or not it lands heads or tails is due to the strength with which the coin is flipped, the strength of air currents and air pressure as it flies through the air, where it is caught, and if it is flipped over once it is caught. *Chance* doesn't *do* anything but describe a probability.
- Many years ago a scientist named Carl Sagan petitioned the U.S. government for a grant to fund the search for intelligent life in outer space. He hoped to find evidence of life by using a super-sensitive instrument to pick up radio signals from distant space. When he received those radio signals, he looked for *order* and *pattern*, which demonstrated the signals were transmitted by intelligent life. In the same way, the order and pattern of the whole universe demonstrate that it was fashioned by intelligent life, not by *chance*. Scientists detect chance in the radio signals constantly (in the form of static with no pattern), but it tells them *nothing*.
- Therefore, when someone says the universe or anything else came about by *chance*, one may say that despite their expertise or skill in other areas, when it comes to this subject they are ignorant, superstitious, or simply repeating a tired theory said and disproved before, yet unthinkingly accepted.

e. **God created:** Inherent in the idea of God is that He is an *intelligent designer*. Only an intelligent designer could create a just-right universe, not chance. Our universe is a just-right universe. According to Hugh Ross in his book *The Fingerprint of God*:

- The universe has a just-right gravitational force.
 - *If it were larger*, the stars would be too hot and would burn up too quickly and too unevenly to support life.
 - *If it were smaller*, the stars would remain so cool, nuclear fusion would never ignite, and there would be no heat and light.
- The universe has a just-right speed of light.
 - *If it were larger*, stars would send out too much light.
 - *If it were smaller*, stars would not send out enough light.
- The universe has a just-right average distance between the stars.
 - *If it were larger*, the heavy element density would be too thin for rocky planets to form, and there would only be gaseous planets.
 - *If it were smaller*, planetary orbits would become destabilized because of the gravitational pull from other stars.
- The universe has a just-right polarity of the water molecule.
 - *If it were greater*, the heat of fusion and vaporization would be too great for life to exist.
 - *If it were smaller*, the heat of fusion and vaporization would be too small for life's existence, liquid water would become too inferior a solvent for life chemistry to proceed, ice would not float, leading to a runaway freeze-up.
- We could conclude that there is *no chance* that such a universe could create itself, apart from an intelligent designer.

f. **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth:** This tells us that God used no pre-existing material to create the earth. The ancient Hebrew word *bara* (**created**) is specific. It means *to create out of nothing*, showing that God created the world out of nothing, not out of Himself. God is separate from His creation. Unlike Eastern and pantheistic perceptions of god, the Bible teaches the universe could perish yet He would remain.

- Men cannot *create* in the sense the term is used in Genesis 1:1. We can only *fashion* or *form* things out of existing material. The closest we come to creating is in reproducing ourselves sexually. This is perhaps one reason why Satan wants to pervert and destroy God's plan and standard for sexuality; it is deeply connected to our being made in the image of God.
- Louis Ginzberg relayed a fascinating legend on how the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet all wanted to begin the Bible, but in the end, the letter "*bet*" was allowed, because he said, "O Lord of the world! May it be Thy will to create Thy world through me, seeing that all the dwellers of the world give praise daily unto Thee through me, as it is said, **B**lessed be the Lord forever. Amen, and Amen." For this reason (according to the legend), the Hebrew Book of Genesis begins, "**B**ereshit God created the heaven and the earth."

3. The Bible's clear teaching of God's creation and the uncertainty of modern science.

a. Some scientists often act certain in their knowledge about the origin of the universe, but their continually revolutionary discoveries prove they are, in some way, feeling their way along in the dark. *Honest* scientists, those who resist pride or arrogance, appreciate how little they do know, and hold their present discoveries with a sense of humility.

b. Some scientists may be overly sure when it comes to what can be known of the universe, but we do not have to accept such arrogance. The constantly changing scene of science is illustrated by a sidebar to a science article many years ago in the *Los Angeles Times* titled, "The Big Bang and What Followed It":

- In the beginning, there was light – but also quarks and electrons. The Big Bang spewed out energy that condensed into radiation and particles. The quarks joined into protons and careened wildly about in a hot, dense, glowing goop as opaque as a star.
- Time (300,000 years or so) passed. Space expanded. Matter cooled. The electrons and protons, electrically irresistible to each other, merged into neutral hydrogen, and from this marriage, the first atoms were born. Space between atoms became as transparent as crystal – pretty much the way it looks today.

The rest, as they say, is history. Atoms merged to form dust clouds, which grew into stars and galaxies and clusters. Stars used up their nuclear fuel, collapsed and exploded in recurring cycles, fusing elements in the process.

Occasionally, a stable planet condensed around a second-generation star, where carbon-based life forms grew into, among other things, cosmologists, the better to contemplate it all.

c. In 1913, an astronomer in Arizona discovered that stars appeared to be moving away from the earth at tremendous speeds, up to two million miles an hour. In 1919, another American astronomer named Edwin Hubble used this information to develop a theory of an expanding universe, which is the foundation of the "Big Bang" idea. Early on, other scientists discovered background radiation from all parts of the universe, which they suppose is the leftover "noise" from the first great explosion. But

scientists are really not much closer at all to knowing anything about this instant beginning to the universe.

d. In fact, the more they find out, the more they discover how much they *don't* know. There was a time when astrophysicists were faced with another challenge: trying to figure out what “dark matter” is. Dark matter is a term some scientists use to explain an enormous apparent excess of gravity in the universe. Dark matter may make up 99.9% of everything in the universe, but no one knows what it is. Though suggestions are offered, they are only suggestions. David O. Caldwell of the University of California at Santa Barbara said, “When it comes to dark matter, the only thing that we are convinced of at the moment is that it’s there.” But actually, scientists cannot even agree on that! Michael S. Turner, an astrophysics professor at the University of Chicago, said: “It’s very humbling. The origin, composition, energy and mass of the most common matter in the entire universe is unknown.”

e. This uncertainty is shown in a March 6, 1995, front-page article in the *Los Angeles Times* headlined, “Rethinking Cosmic Questions”:

Ever since people first stood up amid the tall grasses and looked about the world in wonder, religion, mythology and science all have struggled to explain how the world came to be. But when it comes to creation stories, few can hold a candle to the tale cooked up by modern cosmologists.

Dialing back the cosmic clock about 15 billion years, they depict a time before time, a place before space existed. Out of nothing and nowhere, all the energy and matter in the universe exploded into existence in an event that came to be called... the Big Bang.

While masterfully spinning ideas out of faith and equations, cosmologists were pitifully short on data. They could not see or measure the phenomena they were trying to explain. “Twenty-five years ago, cosmology was very close to religion,” said physicist Roberto Peccei of UCLA.

Experimental cosmologist Chris Stubbs of the University of Washington, “You’ve got these things that are ridiculously far away and ridiculously faint, and... you’ve got to make sense out of it.”

“At times, I miss the old days when I could just work in my office and not worry that someone would disprove my theory in a few weeks,” said Rocky Kold of the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory in Illinois.

“Many of us who have worked in this field for decades still worry that the whole house of cards is going to collapse,” said Princeton cosmologist David Wilkinson.

Recent observations, for example, suggest that the universe is younger than its oldest stars – an enigma that has astronomers scrambling for explanations.

The biggest mystery, however, strikes even scientists as so astonishing as to be absurd: 99% of the universe, according to some estimates, is made of totally unfamiliar stuff. Commonly known as dark matter, it is actually mostly transparent; it neither shines nor casts a shadow. Whatever it is, it is not like us... According to some theories, it also is the glue that holds the universe together, and keeps it from expanding forever into endless space.

f. “The study of human origins seems to be a field in which each discovery raises the debate to a more sophisticated level of uncertainty.” (Christopher Stringer of the Natural Museum of London)

4. One may doubt the ability of many modern scientists to answer the question of origins. But that does not automatically give us confidence in the answer found in the Book of Genesis. Some believe that Genesis only records a creation myth, meant only to show the greatness of God in poetic grandeur. Though there are poetic elements to the account, we believe it was still written to record a historical reality. Other Scriptures, in their approach to Genesis 1, demonstrate this.

a. Psalm 136 connects the Genesis account of creation with the rest of Israel's history in a seamless fabric. The creation account is not put in a category of historical fiction.

b. Jesus quoted Genesis as if it were a purely historical record (Matthew 19:4-6 and 23:35).

c. C.S. Lewis wrote that when he heard a Biblical scholar claim the Genesis creation account was a myth, he didn't want to know about the man's credentials as a Biblical scholar. He wanted to know how many myths the man had read. Myths were Lewis' business as a literary scholar, and he could see the Biblical account of creation was unlike mythical accounts.

d. It is true that Genesis was not written primarily as a scientific document. But if God gave us a truly scientific, detailed account of creation, written in scientific language, there would be no one who could understand it and no end to the length of such an account. Even if it were written in simple, 20th-century scientific language, it would have made no sense to all previous generations and no sense to future generations either.

e. *It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter* (Proverbs 25:2). Scientific inquiry is the glory of man; yet it must all be done with utmost humility, realizing God *conceals* these matters for man to search out.

5. God did all this in the beginning, yet there was much before the beginning.

a. **In the beginning, God:** God Himself was before the beginning: *Your throne is established from of old; You are from everlasting* (Psalm 93:2). Some are troubled by the questions, "Where did God come from?" and "Who created God?" The answer is found in the definition of God – that God is the uncreated Being, eternal – without beginning or end.

- This is demonstrated in several passages of Scripture. *LORD, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God* (Psalm 90:1-2).
- J. Edwin Orr used a memorable definition of God, which was thoroughly Biblical: *God is the only infinite, eternal, and unchangeable spirit, the perfect being in whom all things begin, and continue, and end.*

b. **In the beginning, God:** God was in three Persons before the beginning, and the Persons shared a relationship of love and fellowship: *"O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was...for You loved Me before the foundation of the world"* (John 17:5, 17:24).

c. **In the beginning, God:** Before the beginning, there was an *eternal purpose* in the heart of God (Ephesians 3:11) to *gather together in one all things in Christ* (Ephesians 1:10). God's purpose was to "resolve" or "sum up" all things in Jesus as if Jesus Himself were the answer to a great and complex problem God wrote out on the "blackboard" of the universe.

d. **In the beginning, God:** Before the beginning, God had a specific plan to fulfill this eternal purpose, with many different aspects revealed to us:

- The mission of Jesus was foreordained before the foundation of the world: *He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you (1 Peter 1:20)*.
- Eternal life was promised before time began: *in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began (Titus 1:2)*.
- The mystery of the gospel (the cross) was foreordained before the ages: *But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory (1 Corinthians 2:7)*.
- The grace given unto us was given before the world began: *who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began (2 Timothy 1:9)*.
- Believers in Jesus Christ were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world: *just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love (Ephesians 1:4)*.

e. **In the beginning, God:** At some time before the beginning, God created the angels, because they witnessed the creation of the heavens and the earth (Job 38:7).