

Study 1: God's Intention for Creation

What do you feel in the face of injustice? That knot in your stomach, that anger, that thought that cries out: "This is not how it is supposed to be!" Helpless? Hopeless? Whether another life is taken because of state-sanctioned violence, families separated at the border waiting in inhumane living conditions, someone vulnerable being abused or taken advantage of by someone in power—the injustice in our world can feel overwhelming and sinister.

Where is God in the midst of this? Does God care about the rampant injustice that cripples us and our communities? If he does care, is he doing anything about it?

In the Christian worldview, justice is actually inherent in God's character and central to God's desires for the world. However, people who claim to follow Jesus haven't always reflected God's heart for justice; in fact, followers of Jesus throughout history have at times been the very people that perpetuate and uphold injustice. So, what does the Bible really say about justice? This series will trace the theme of justice throughout this sacred text. We'll start at the beginning and ask: What was God's intention for our world?

Discuss

- How would you define "justice"? What has shaped your understanding of justice?
- What injustices in the world grieve you? What makes you say, "This is not how things are supposed to be"?



Genesis 1 is the very first chapter of the Bible. Look out for repetition, imagery, and contrasts in this poetic retelling of the creation of the world. This is a long text, so listen with your visual imagination engaged and take off pressure to closely analyze or remember everything.

Genesis 1

¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. ³ And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. ⁶ And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water." ⁷ So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. ⁸ God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day. ⁹ And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good. ¹¹ Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. ¹² The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day. ¹⁴ And

God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. ¹⁶ God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day. ²⁰ And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky." ²¹ So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." ²³ And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day. ²⁴ And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. ²⁵ God made the wild animals according to their kinds,

the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. 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.

Discuss

- What is one thing that stands out to you in this description of creation?
- What relationships do you see in this text? What role do these relationships play in the ecosystem of creation? (Ecosystem: a complex network or interconnected system)
- What does it mean to be made in the image of God?
- Additional questions (optional)
 - What verbs are used to describe God's actions in the passage? What are creations' actions in the passage? (O)
 - How would you describe the relationship between Creator and creation? (O/I)
 - Humans are the only parts of creation created in God's image and likeness (vs. 27). How do God's actions in the text bring deeper insight into the instructions God gives to the first people? (I)
 - What is the significance of us being created in God's image and likeness? (I/A)

- In our world, how is the image-bearing nature of people affirmed and/or denigrated? How can you affirm and/or defend the “imago dei” (image of God) of those in your community? (A)
- The refrain “God saw that it was good” is repeated throughout the text. How might this frame or affect our understanding of justice? (I/A)

Summary + Reflection

God speaks creation into being with intentionality and love. In this expansive ecosystem of flourishing, there is no lack. We see God’s generosity, creativity, and heart of hospitality, ensuring that all of creation is cared for. Creation is interconnected, and when these relationships are honored and stewarded, the world can thrive. Humanity finds unique dignity and purpose as ones who are made in the image and likeness of God, called to cultivate and create, just as God did.

This is God’s intention for creation—where things are as they should be (we’ll discuss the concept of “shalom” more next time!). Stewardship of creation leads to the flourishing of all. In contrast, abuse of creation or dishonoring the image of God in humanity are affronts to God and acts of injustice. Genesis 1 is a window into the heart of God, and in future weeks, we’ll see how the world strays farther and farther from this beautiful picture of flourishing.

- Take a minute to pause and listen; ask God to highlight something from today’s text or discussion. What emotions or thoughts arise? How might God be speaking to you?

Apply

Spiritual Practice: Breath Prayer

Breathing: it’s easy to ignore this simple act that keeps us alive. This week, try a simple *Breath Prayer*, an ancient, Christian prayer practice that helps us be attentive to our bodies and to

God, the giver of life and breath. Spiritual practices sustain and ground us in the long-term pursuit of justice.

At the start or end of your day, slow down for a few minutes and imagine the picture of Creation flourishing.

As you inhale, pray aloud or in your mind: *Creator God*

As you exhale, pray aloud or in your mind: *Thank you for creation*

Reflect + Share

Journal your responses to these questions, then share them with your group.

- What is God saying to you or your community through this passage?
- How was practicing breath prayer for you? (How did your body feel? Mind? Spirit?)

Closing Prayer & Announcements

Participant Survey - please fill out this survey (<https://bit.ly/jbspres>) so we best serve future participants.