

GOD THE CREATOR

A Gospel-Centered Exploration in **GENESIS**



MATT CARTER & HALIM SUH



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ABOUT THE GOSPEL PROJECT

Some people see the Bible as a collection of stories with morals for life application. But it's so much more. Sure, the Bible has some stories in it, but it's also full of poetry, history, codes of law and civilization, songs, prophecy, letters—even a love letter. When you tie it all together, something remarkable happens. A story is revealed. One story. The story of redemption through Jesus. This is *The Gospel Project*.

When we begin to see the Bible as the story of redemption through Jesus Christ, God's plan to rescue the world from sin and death, our perspective changes. We no longer look primarily for what the Bible says about us but instead see what it tells us about God and what He has done. After all, it's the gospel that saves us, and when we encounter Jesus in the pages of Scripture, the gospel works on us, transforming us into His image. *We become God's gospel project.*

ABOUT THE WRITERS



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Barry Cram adapted this material for use with small groups.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Welcome to *The Gospel Project*, a gospel-centered small-group study that dives deep into the things of God, lifts up Jesus, focuses on the grand story of Scripture, and drives participants to be on mission. This small-group Bible study provides opportunities to study the Bible and to encounter the living Christ. *The Gospel Project* provides you with tools and resources to purposefully study God's Word and to grow in the faith and knowledge of God's Son. And what's more, you can do so in the company of others, encouraging and building up one another. Here are some things to remember that will help you maximize the usefulness of this resource:

GATHER A GROUP. We grow in the faith best in community with other believers, as we love, encourage, correct, and challenge one another. The life of a disciple of Christ was never meant to be lived alone, in isolation.

PRAY. Pray regularly for your group members.

PREPARE. This resource includes the Bible study content, three devotionals, and discussion questions for each session. Work through the session and devotionals in preparation for each group session. Take notes and record your own questions. Also consider the follow-up questions so you are ready to participate in and add to the discussion, bringing up your own notes and questions where appropriate.

RESOURCE YOURSELF. Make good use of the additional resources available on the Web at www.gospelproject.com/additionalresources and search for this specific title. Download a podcast. Read a blog post. Be intentional about learning from others in the faith. For tips on how to better lead groups or additional ideas for leading this Bible study, visit: www.ministrygrid.com/web/thegospelproject.

GROUP TIME. Gather together with your group to discuss the session and devotional content. Work through the follow-up questions and your own questions. Discuss the material and the implications for the lives of believers and the mission to which we have been called.

OVERFLOW. Remember ... *The Gospel Project* is not just a Bible study. *We* are the project. The gospel is working on us. Don't let your preparation time be simply about the content. Let the truths of God's Word soak in as you study. Let God work on your heart first, and then pray that He will change the hearts of the other people in your group.



SESSION 1

IN THE BEGINNING

Man does not have to wander around in darkness wondering what kind of God he serves or owes allegiance to; Yahweh has communicated, and the traits He communicates are worthy of worship.¹

TIMOTHY M. PIERCE

INDIVIDUAL STUDY

A good beginning sets the tone, gives the context, draws you in, and makes you want to know more. Take these beginnings, for example, from some of the most enduring works of literature:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness ... it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.

CHARLES DICKENS, *A TALE OF TWO CITIES*

There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it.

C. S. LEWIS, *THE VOYAGE OF THE DAWN TREADER*

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

JANE AUSTEN, *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

What is your favorite opening line or scene from a book or movie that captured your attention and didn't let go?

What if a book exists that endured hundreds of years, even thousands? Countless are the books written by men and women, but what if we had a book authored by God Himself? What would be the beginning line of this book? "In the beginning, God ..."

With four simple words, the Bible opens dramatically as we are introduced to the greatest reality ever to exist—God. In Genesis 1:1, we meet a God who is simply there. He is not dependent on anything or anyone else. And the rest of Genesis 1 describes this God creating everything else, showing the nature of His holiness, His set-apartness. While everything else in creation has to be described in relation to something else, only God can simply be.

As we dive into God's story revealed through Scripture, we must recognize that the beginning of the story does what beginnings should—it sets the stage for all that follows. In the beginning, God created everything, and He created everything good. And vitally important for grasping the scope of the gospel, we will see that God created everything through His Son.

Throughout the week engage these daily study sections on your own. Each of these examines the different aspects of God's creation. There are three daily readings to prepare you before your group meets for this session. Interact with the Scriptures, and be ready to interact with your small group.

1 God Created Everything

How else could you describe the creation of everything unless you are first introduced to the Someone who preceded everything? That's the whole point of Genesis 1:1. The God who simply is, who preceded everything and is not dependent on anything, created everything.

¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

GENESIS 1:1-2

When you are studying the Bible, seeing the context is the fundamental rule you have to follow to interpret Scripture properly. (1) Who was the intended audience? (2) What was the purpose of the author? These are vital questions to answer so that we come to the text with the proper questions that it was intended to answer.

The original audience of the Book of Genesis was the ancient Israelites on their way to the promised land (a story for a later time). They would not have been asking some of the questions that pique our interest, such as the age of the earth or the science behind the creation. So what, then, was the original purpose for the creation account in Genesis?

Why do you think the Israelites needed to know God created everything?

The Israelites would have wrestled with questions such as “Is our God the real God?” or “Is He the best God?” or “Is He the most powerful God?” Having lived so long among the gods of the Egyptians and being introduced to the gods of the foreign nations that surrounded them, the Israelites struggled to believe that their God was the true God.

To remedy such wandering hearts, God led Moses to write Genesis to help His people understand that the God of their bedtime stories—the God of their fathers—was the very same God who created the world. The God of Israel, not the gods of the Canaanites or the Philistines, was the Creator of everything.

⁴ For the LORD is great and is highly praised; He is feared above all gods.

⁵ For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens.

PSALM 96:4-5

Why is it important that we know God created everything?

We are no different than the original audience of the Book of Genesis. We may not be tempted to bow down to wooden statues, but our hearts are just as prone to wander. Lazy Sundays instead of early Sunday worship sure sound nice. You dream about all the things you could have bought with your tithe by the end of the year. There's an ever-present guilt each time your eyes steal a glimpse of your attractive coworker.

Obedience can seem too costly at times, and our hearts wonder: *Is God real? Does He love me? Is He worth it?* When we have these questions and struggle to believe in the realness and goodness of God, He wants us to recount Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning, God ..." When there was nothing but nothing, God was, and that ought to create in us a wonder about Him that trumps all our other wonderings.

In what ways should knowing that God created everything affect our thoughts and our emotions regarding God?

This God who owes His existence to no one and is in need of nothing decided to create everything, including you. This truth ought to overwhelm you with a feeling of love to such an extent that you are able to reject any other suitors coming after your heart. God created everything. Guard this truth and cherish it because every threat against it is trying to rob you of your wonder of God and the love God has for you.

¹⁹ since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what He has made. As a result, people are without excuse.

ROMANS 1:19-20

Ever since these first six days, all of creation has been aware of God. Did you know that? The purpose and design of creation is to tell the glory of God, to plainly display His power and His divine nature. When God created the heavens, the stars, the trees, the mountains, the birds, and the animals, they did their job well. Their existence points to a Creator.

In what ways does nature reveal God to you? How do you respond?

2

God Created Everything Good

⁶ Then God said, "Let there be an expanse between the waters, separating water from water." ⁷ So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above the expanse. And it was so. ⁸ God called the expanse "sky." Evening came and then morning: the second day. ⁹ Then God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry land "earth," and He called the gathering of the water "seas." And God saw that it was good. ¹¹ Then God said, "Let the earth produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds." And it was so. ¹² The earth produced vegetation: seed-bearing plants according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ Evening came and then morning: the third day.

GENESIS 1:6-13

The next critical thing we need to see from the creation account is that not only did God create everything, but God created everything good.

What does that mean? Why does God call each step of His creation good?

Is it morally good? Yes. When God created everything, certainly there was no sin in it. Is it beautiful and pleasant to the eyes? Yes. You don't have to stare at the Grand Canyon or a sunset for long to realize that the work of creation is beautiful. Is it usable? Yes. When we say a knife is good, we're saying something about its ability to perform its intended purpose and design.

So what is the purpose and design of creation? (1) To declare God's glory and proclaim the work of His hands (Ps. 19:1). (2) To reveal things about God that are invisible to us (Rom. 1:20). Creation reveals God's eternal power and divine nature in a way that we can clearly see and understand them.

In what ways have you experienced the goodness of God's creation even today? What do these experiences tell you about God?

In the theological world, creation is general revelation. General revelation is the revealing of God that is general both in terms of its content and its scope. In content, it offers broad and

common knowledge of God rather than very specific, very finely tuned truths about God. General revelation can reveal truths such as “God is powerful,” but it can’t reveal specific things such as “God sent His Son, Jesus, to save the world.” And it is also general in scope, that is, it addresses all people. Its focus is not revealing something to a specific group of people but revealing something to everyone. Creation is one of the main avenues of general revelation.

The creation account in Genesis 1 is divided into two sets of three days. Before God speaks in verse 3, we see that the earth was formless, empty, and dark (v. 2). The first set of days (Gen. 1:3-13) addresses the creation’s darkness and formlessness.

³ Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light “day,” and He called the darkness “night.” Evening came and then morning: the first day.

GENESIS 1:3-5

God created light in the midst of darkness, separated the two, and gave them names: the light “day” and the darkness “night.” He created the expanse in the midst of the waters, separated the two, and gave a name to the expanse: “sky.” God created boundaries for the waters beneath the sky, caused dry land to appear, and gave them names: the dry land “earth” and the water “seas.”

Even in general revelation, what does this say about God that He brings light, form, and order to the chaos?

Take a moment to read the second set of days (found in Gen. 1:14-25). It is here that God addresses creation’s emptiness. All the spheres that God created by bringing form to His creation—the spheres of the heavens, the sky, sea, and land—He now fills. God fills the heavens with lights—the sun, moon, and stars. He fills the seas with fish and the sky with birds. God fills the land with living creatures. And again, all of these things He is creating to display who He is to the world.

Think about a time when your life felt empty. How does His creative power bring “fullness” into your life?

3

God Created Everything Through His Son

⁵ For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth—as there are many “gods” and many “lords”—⁶ yet for us there is one God, the Father. All things are from Him, and we exist for Him. And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ.

All things are through Him, and we exist through Him.

1 CORINTHIANS 8:5-6

First Corinthians 8:5-6 tells us that God created everything through His Son. In light of this passage, you might reread the creation account and say, “I see the Holy Spirit hovering and God the Father speaking, but where is the Son?” John 1:1-3 answers: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were created through Him, and apart from Him not one thing was created that has been created.” Every time we see God speak things into existence, the Son is there. All things exist and hold together because of Him.

In what ways should knowing that God created everything through His Son affect our thoughts and our emotions regarding Jesus?

The other kind of revelation theologians refer to is *special* revelation. Special revelation is specific in content and scope. In content, it reveals not just general things about God’s power and nature but specifically reveals the God of the gospel with words. It reveals the redemption plan of God to save people through the cross and resurrection of His Son. In scope, it is given to specific people at specific times in specific places.

Consider the light that God has created. He revealed Himself “out there”—and it was good—but it isn’t enough. So God also reveals Himself “in here.” God created everything (general revelation) through His Son, but He later did a greater work of special revelation in His Son. This Light, through whom all other lights exist, not only casts out physical darkness but can cast out the spiritual darkness in people’s hearts. This revelation isn’t simply the general display of creation, this revelation involves words—the very Word of God in the Person of Jesus and the Word of God as written in the Bible.

There is a place in which these two revelations, these two lights, collide and converge, a place in which God can reveal Himself to the world not only generally but also specially. That place is within the believer.

How does God reveal Jesus in you?

A believer is a representative of humanity, the apex of all of God's creation. No other creation of God can tell the glory of God like a human being because no other creation bears the image of God. The heavens, the mountains, the oceans—they all proclaim the glory of God. But every single person we see and encounter is, by nature, showing us something of God Himself.

We carry the greatest light of God's general revelation (His image). But even greater than that, we are also to bear the Light of God's special revelation (His Son). God has commanded to shine in our hearts the light of Jesus Christ. So we are stewards of the light of God's special revelation. This is why the Bible not only says that Jesus is the light but that we are light:

¹⁴ You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

MATTHEW 5:14-16

What are some ways we can be the light of the world and point people to the Light of the world—Jesus?



GROUP STUDY

Warm Up

In what ways did you express your “creative side” as a kid? If you are a parent, how do you get your children interested in building or creating?

This week, you studied and thought about God’s creation. From the beginning, everything was good because God is good. Think about it. This entire universe is an extension of God’s goodness. He did not just create something and label it “good.” God described it so because He is good—His purposes, His plan. It’s all there! The inherent goodness of God is on display showing through His creation.

Here are three New Testament Scriptures that reveal God’s goodness. Read them aloud and answer the questions to get your small group-discussion started.

¹⁶ Just then someone came up and asked Him, “Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?” ¹⁷ “Why do you ask Me about what is good?” He said to him. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.”

MATTHEW 19:16-17

Why do you think Jesus answered this man’s question with “who God is” first?

⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing should be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.

1 TIMOTHY 4:4

¹⁷ Every generous act and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights; with Him there is no variation or shadow cast by turning.

JAMES 1:17

Describe the conditions or circumstances that would make people question God’s goodness.

In what ways does God’s goodness found in creation impact us—past, present, and future?

Discussion

There is not a square inch in the whole domain
of our human existence over which Christ, who is
Sovereign over all, does not cry: “Mine!”²

ABRAHAM KUYPER (1837-1920)

It is important to know and affirm the goodness of God’s creation. In Genesis 1, God repeatedly affirmed that all of His creation was good, even “very good” (1:31). It is good, in God’s judgment, because He created it for a purpose that it fulfilled—to reflect and display the good character of the Creator. Therefore, sin and evil should not be seen as a foundational part of the creation but rather as a corruption of it. While the creation has been marred and distorted as a result of sin, it is still good in the hands of God and serves His purpose of proclaiming His glory in the world. God’s people should affirm and seek to preserve the goodness of God’s creation (see Gen. 2:15).

During this time you will have an opportunity to discuss what God revealed to you during the week. Listed below are some of the questions from your daily reading assignments. They will guide your small-group discussion.

1. In what ways should knowing that God created everything affect our thoughts and our emotions regarding Him?
2. What does it mean that God’s creation is “good”? Why does God call each step of His creation good?
3. In what ways have you experienced the goodness of God’s creation even today? What do these experiences tell you about God?
4. In what ways should knowing that God created everything through His Son affect our thoughts and our emotions regarding Jesus?
5. How does God reveal Jesus in you?
6. What are some ways we can be the light of the world and point people to the Light of the world—Jesus?

Conclusion

God created everything, so don't worry about anything. It's in His hands. God created everything good. Everything surrounding you—the sun, moon, stars, and everything else in creation—is God's way of saying He wants to know you and be known by you. And God created everything through His Son. Because God has revealed all that He is to us through His Son, we now live to reveal Jesus to the world.

If we have been created by God and He has commanded the light of Jesus to shine in our hearts, then we are doubly His. Therefore, we must now seek to discover our role in the overarching plan and purpose of God to manifest His glory and love to the world. We have to be a light to this world, and by nature, we are a light to this world.

Spend some time praying this for you and for your group:

“God, we acknowledge that You are good and what You do is good. We thank You for sharing that goodness with us. Help us to glorify You and to show Your goodness to all. Amen.”

1. Timothy M. Pierce, *Enthroned on Our Praise*, in *NAC Studies in Bible & Theology* (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 17.
2. Abraham Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 488.
3. Billy Graham, in *Billy Graham in Quotes*, eds. Franklin Graham with Donna Lee Toney (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 89.

