



# Sermon Growth Guide

**August 30, 2020**

**The Beautiful Story – Beautiful People**

**Genesis 1:26-31**

**Key Verse:** Genesis 1:27

“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

**Big Idea:** You are beautifully made in the very image and likeness of God.

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## Foundations

Welcome to week three of *The Beautiful Story* where we are learning and reflecting on the kingdom truth that you are beautifully made in the very image and likeness of God. A term often associated with this thrilling reality is “Imago Dei,” Latin for “Image of God.” You are an image bearer of the Divine!

John Calvin writes, “There is not one blade of grass, there is no color in this world that is not intended to make us rejoice.” This truth carries over to the creation of humanity, to the creation of you.

You are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14). Your intrinsic beauty as being an image bearer of God ought to cause every person on the planet to respect you and care for you. Likewise, the reality that everyone you meet is an image bearer of God ought to cause you to respect them and care for them.

God made a beautiful you. And your neighbor is beautiful, every one of them.

Humanity has fallen from its original beauty and balance, but we can still see it. We can still see the Imago Dei in humanity when we look for it.

Open and close your time of further study and application in prayer. Ask the Spirit of God to guide and guard your time in His Word.

## Understanding God’s Word

What reason is given in verse 26 for the creation of humanity?

What does God tell us about gender in verse 27? Host a conversation about how this view of gender compares to the views held by your family, friends and co-workers.

According to verses 28-31, in what ways is humanity blessed, charged and gifted?

## Applying God’s Word

Pastor Tim talks about how bearing the very image and likeness of God is the foundation for dignity and responsibility.

In what practical way can you apply this kingdom truth to your week?

Do you view each and every person as having intrinsic dignity and worth? Do you live into the mandate of stewardship given to you by your creator?

## Witnessing God’s Word

Think of one person who does not yet walk closely with the Lord and who would be blessed to hear that they are made in the image and likeness of God. Take a moment to close your time by praying for that person. Discern an action step you can take in moving toward this person with the love of Christ.

Be careful asking questions about human origins. A mom once told me about driving her four-year-old home from preschool when the little boy asked, “Mommy, where did I come from?” The mom was a little surprised. She didn’t think she would have to teach him, you know, all that, quite yet. But she believed being a good mom meant answering questions with openness and honesty, so she swallowed hard and began to explain everything. “Oh,” said her boy. “Amy says she comes from Indiana.” Where do I come from? We are telling the Beautiful Story. The story of everything. A good and beautiful God made a good and beautiful world. What a beautiful world God made. After preaching on that, someone sent me a solid John Calvin quote: “There is not one blade of grass, there is no color in this world that is not intended to make us rejoice.” Solid. True. Beautiful God. Beautiful World. Today we see, He put a beautiful people in it—a good and beautiful people.

Yes, we are still in Genesis 1. We’re not getting very far if we are going to tell the whole story, right? But the intro is so important. The setup is everything. Much of how we understand our story comes from how we understand our origins. Where do human beings come from? People wonder is Christianity fundamentally an affirming or a shaming system? Is Christianity a people-loving or a people-hating deal? You might think Christianity is stuck on sin, they talk too much about sin. People are looking for affirming talk. Maybe Christianity is just a self-supporting shame system: “I make you feel sick so you buy the medicine I’m selling. You’re not sick, but I want you to feel sick so you buy my cure.” Is that the story of God and Jesus, the Beautiful Story? No. The reason we talk about sin—and we will talk about sin next week even more—the reason we talk about sin is that we are heartbroken at what has been lost. Before we talk about what’s broken, let’s talk about what God made. God made a beautiful people.

“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.’” (Genesis 1:26) We mentioned this two weeks ago, how God speaks in plural. “Let us.” God is one God in community, the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Did the Son participate in creation? Yes, through him all things were made. Did the Spirit participate in creation? Yes. The Spirit was hovering over the waters. When God does anything, God does it as the Trinity God, the One God in Three Persons. “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.” We are made in the image of God. Beautiful God. Beautiful People. In the image.



Is Christianity a people-hating religion? We proclaim that all people were made in the image of God, bearing his likeness. In human history and ethics this one prominent point, the *Imago Dei*, has been the foundation for human dignity, human responsibility and human capacity.

**Dignity:** Why can’t I dismiss the concerns of groups of people who feel that they are being discriminated against because of their race? Because every race, every person is made in the image of God. Why is it any concern of mine that children are sold into slavery halfway around the world? Because every race, every person is made in the image of God. Why do I have to worry about hungry children in Ethiopia or girls trapped in prostitution in Thailand or the Beirut residents whose city exploded because of negligence by their government? Because every single person has dignity. To the poor, the rich, the enfranchised and the disenfranchised dignity is due. They were made in the image of God.

**Responsibility:** This notion of “so that they may rule,” “so that they have dominion over,” that’s best understood as “so that they can be responsible for.” This is God’s world. We have extraordinary power to either plunder and violate or cultivate and nurture this beautiful world. Put it this way. If your uncle lets you use his condo in Breck, do you tear it up? Do you bash your skis against the walls and tromp around in muddy boots? Do you yank the artwork off the walls and see what you can get for it at the pawn shop? No. You’re grateful for it. You care for it. You tend it a little. Really, you hope to leave it better than you found it—that’s the best result. I mean maybe the kids spilled something here or there—I don’t even know those kids! Is a Christian environmentally aware? You bet. God has given us dominion in his house: “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.’” (Genesis 1:28) We are guests in God’s place. This does not mean environment is more important than people, and it does not mean that human cultivation of the environment is always wrong—there’s an active idea out there that to leave nature to itself is the only noble option; that nature was never meant to have human beings in it. That’s nonsense. God put us in this environment to exercise cultivation and rule and dominion, on his behalf. But we respect it. Responsibility. The animals look to you. If your dog doesn’t eat, it’s your fault. Responsibility.

**Capacity:** In the Imago Dei we have capacity. We are creative in the image of the Creator. We have dominion in the image of the Lord of All. We love community in the image of the eternal community God of the Trinity. We have capacity for self-reflection. We

have self-consciousness. You know, a squirrel doesn’t worry about the meaning of life. Find nut. Bury nut. Eat nut. We have self-consciousness. We have a soul. And so, we have capacity for relationship— relationship with ourselves, relationship with one another, relationship with creation, relationship with God. We have capacity for relationship with God! We were made to worship—to glory in the glory of God. “Let us make mankind,” says God, “in our image, in our likeness.” Beautiful God. Beautiful World. Beautiful People with capacity to do beautiful things. “God blessed them,” says verse 28. God blessed them in his own image and likeness, God blessed and blesses us still with dignity, responsibility and capacity.

“Let us make mankind in our image.” Then God did it. God is an integrated whole. We think and quibble and deliberate about our plans. Not God. Let’s do this. Done. “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27) Male and female he created them. There are foundational Scriptures which, simply to read them with agreement runs straight against the grain of our contemporary culture. Just reading this verse with agreement I have disqualified myself from professorships at 95% of our nation’s universities and most seminaries. It is considered binary and discriminatory. But there it sits. Male and female. Along with Genesis 2:24, “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh,” this is the Christian, biblical view of human sexuality and gender, and marriage. Even Jesus’ preached on them: “‘Haven’t you read,’ he replied, ‘that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his



wife, and the two will become one flesh' ? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” (Matthew 19:4-6)

But this is a hard teaching in our time. Please be careful. Empathetic. Loving. There is so much pain and hurt, so much heated emotion. Families fly to pieces. Careers end. It feels like when the clay on the wheel goes wonky and chunks of it shoot every direction at once. Wherever you are with gender issues, I wonder if you can take this verse again as a solid foundation, as the base clay at the center. We need peace. You need peace. I know it gets confusing. At the very minimum take this as a starting place, a first principle. Start here: “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27) I was created by God. I am a man. She was created by God. She is a woman. We were designed by God for one another. Foundation. It's like going down into the cool of the basement and laying your hand on a foundation stone, quiet and still. Isaiah warned about when beauty looks ugly, “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.” (Isaiah 5:20) Sometimes we go upside down and a good thing looks like a bad thing. This isn't ugly. This is beautiful. There is a peace that comes just after submitting your mind to the Lord. “Maybe I don't see it all clearly, Lord, but help me find the beauty. Help me find peace,” we pray. And be kind. Be kind.

“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.” (Genesis 1:31) It was good, good, very good. God takes delight. I haven't even scratched the surface of the human body itself. What a thing! What amazing systems and integrated beautiful powers. What capacity to make, and achieve, and create, and love and sing and heal—what a system we

have of healing and fighting off viruses and nasty bugs, the immune system. Go immune system! It is beautiful. Beautiful God, beautiful world, beautiful human being. Now, a lot has gone wrong and we will talk about that next week. But it is not right to start with what went wrong. It is right to start with the world God made, the people God made, the beautiful God who made a beautiful world and put beautiful people in it as a blessing. God blessed us to be a blessing. There is much goodness in us. Dignity. Responsibility. Capacity. In the image and likeness of God himself. Beautiful.

Is Christianity a human-affirming or human-debasing religion? Well, it isn't humanism. Humanism puts all its faith right here, in us, in our ability to make progress, to always be on the rise, to conquer and overcome every problem we face. But, listen now, here's the problem. Humanism creates victims. If I'm inherently good and have the ability to achieve my dreams, then why am I so frustrated? It can't be me. It must be something out there. I'm a victim. It must be the government, it must be the system, it must be the church, it must be...you! If I'm perfect and powerful, the only explanation for why I have not yet under my own power attained peace and happiness under my own beatific vision is—I must be a victim. The Beautiful Story of God does not create victims. It names a beautiful people subject to sin. Victims are trapped. Sinners can be redeemed. Tim Keller says, “The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.” A beautiful people. We are not victims. But we are sinners. Sinners in need of a Savior. In the Savior Jesus Christ, you are more loved and accepted than you ever dared hope.

