

Prayer

It is a wonderful and glorious thing Lord Jesus, for us to receive the blessing of Your presence. The world does not understand it, and we cannot fully explain it, but we can know it with certainty through the inner witness of the Spirit. May we rejoice in the help and assurance this gives us, and testify to others of Your life changing power. Glory be to You, Lord Jesus: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Prayer Ministry

Pray that God's people will rediscover the power of prayer and a heart for praying with people to help them. Pray for the Spirit to open the hearts of His people towards others.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for the elderly who mourn the loss of friends*
- *Pray for those who are designing the technology of the future*
- *Give thanks for the disabled, who contribute greatly to our lives*

Meditation

Now, let us truly honour God– with conviction.

Give thanks for the mercy of Christ – without doubts;
Offer every part of life to Him – without objection;
Love each person that we meet – without question;
Study the eternal Word of God – without complaining;
Spend time in prayer each day– without exception;
Support the church at all times – without moaning;
Do everything possible for the poor – without protest;
Give all our possessions to Him – without excuses;
Speak openly about the Saviour – without hesitation;
Be bold to do what He has said – without dissent;

And let all this come from the heart – with passion.

Bible Study - Genesis 1:26-31

²⁶ Then God said, 'Let us make people in our image, just like ourselves; and let them rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air and the cattle; and over all the earth including all the creatures that crawl on the ground.'²⁷ So God created people in his image, in his divine likeness; and he created them male and female.

²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fertile and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air and every living thing that moves on the earth.'

²⁹ God said, 'Look, I have given you every plant that yields seed over the whole earth, and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. You shall have them for food.'³⁰ I have given every green plant for food to everything that has the

breath of life, to all living things on earth, all birds of the air, and all creatures that crawl on the ground.' And it was so. ³¹ God saw everything that he had made, and was indeed very good. Evening came and morning came: day six.

Review

The sixth day of Creation contains three commands of God, and describes the special nature of God's creation of men and women (1:27,28). It also describes their immediate surroundings of birds, domesticated animals and insects (1:26), the responsibilities of people to rule and exercise authority over all creatures (1:26,28), and also to eat the vegetation available to them (1:29).

Men and women in the 'likeness' of God! The making of men and women is the highlight of Creation because God made them 'in his image' (1:27). It is quite amazing to think that people are made 'like' God, but this scripture tells us that we are very close to Him indeed, and we need to think carefully about what this means. There must be similarities between God and us, but at this point within scripture, we know little more. Is this likeness spiritual or physical, or both, and does our likeness mean that God thinks and feels as we do? These are intriguing questions, and the rest of the Bible gives us some answers, but there are many mysteries about us as well as God, and we will never understand them fully while living in the created world. What we can do, however, is to look at what we know about God in His creation; for if this is what He has made and He thinks it is good, then it shows us something of His amazing nature and character! At the very least, God is creative and loving, for He cares for what He has made, He likes what He does and He has a purpose for everything and everyone He has created; and there is so much more!

'Let us make people in our image' As soon as we read, there are some surprises awaiting us within these verses. To begin with, God describes Himself in the plural; He says, 'Let us make people in our image, just like ourselves' (1:26). This can be a shock to all who believe that God is 'one', and think of Him as a 'singular' entity! Genesis says that God is more complex than this, and we should not be surprised at this because we have already discovered that God is known in different ways. At the very beginning of creation, it was God's Spirit who 'brooded' over the chaos and created order, for example (1:2). Later passages of scripture speak quite openly of the different ways in which we experience God in Creation; Proverbs describes the presence of 'wisdom' (Prov 8:22ff), and the New Testament says Jesus was present 'in the beginning' (John 1:1,2ff). Indeed, some texts describe a council of heavenly beings (Psalm 8:5, 82:1,6, Job 1:6, Isaiah 40:14) to whom God speaks of His creative power. There are many different theories about this, but they all accept that God is more multifaceted than a solitary being. Indeed, this is the first indication in Scripture that God could perhaps be 'Three in One' instead of 'One'. Genesis does not define the multifaceted nature of God, but it points us towards the mystery of the Trinity and all that this has come to mean for Christians over the centuries.

The unity of man and woman The next surprise is to do with the creation of people, who are made 'male and female' (1:27). However, the manner in which Genesis describes this suggests that both male and female together equate to God's 'divine likeness'. So, it is men and women who reflect God's 'image'; not one or the other, but both together! If we take this thought one stage further, then we are led to think that when men and women are together they reflect the image of God more fully than when they are separate. This sounds radical, but it is easily observable that married men and women find their fulfilment in each other and discover that their life as a couple is a unity, and far richer together than if they were alone. This is not to say that those who are not married are less complete than others, but the general experience of humanity is that the bond of one man and one woman

is uniquely expressive of human life. This is largely because it is within this bond that God blesses us with the creative ability to conceive and bear children (see also Matt 19:5).

These connections are not incidental to what Genesis describes in this passage, for after making people as 'male and female', God commanded them to raise children and populate the earth (1:28). In addition, after God made everything He told men and women to look after what He had made; indeed, this granting of stewardship over the earth takes a substantial part of three verses (1:28-31) before God pronounces for the last time that everything He has made is 'good' (1:31). The work of Creation has been done, but one thing remains!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss what it means to you to know that you are made in the image and likeness of God.
2. Is there any implied difference here in this text between male and female? What is about the unity of man and women that makes their relationship unique?
3. Is it fair to say that vegetables are the earthly source and sustenance of all life (1:29), or that people should only eat vegetables?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The study today has raised a host of questions that are very challenging for us. It may be difficult for some to agree what they mean by being 'made in the image of God', or what it means for God to have made 'male and female' in His likeness. However, this should at least make us realise afresh how much God loves us and the importance He places on both our presence and our role within the world. And we are not even talking here about salvation, but simply 'running' the world! Big issues are raised for us about our responsibilities for the earth and everything in it.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Some say that it is more important to do evangelism than work to prevent environmental disaster on our planet. What do you think? Indeed, what can you do yourself about the state of our world and God's charge to look after it, and how does this relate to the church's task of evangelism?*
- *Pray and fast for the world in which we live. It is so vast, and yet its problems are acute in this age, and people are very divided on its future. Seek the Lord's will on issues to do with the health of our planet today.*

Final Prayer

You, Lord God, can raise a single man or woman to do Your will and through that servant change the world. Work with such power in our midst, we pray, to revitalise both the Church and the world in which we live. This we ask in Jesus' name; AMEN