



The ALIVE! Bible Study Series

**STUDY AND REFLECTION GUIDE FOR SESSION 1
“IN GOD’S IMAGE AND LIKENESS” (Gen. 1:26-2:3, 7)**

Objective:

To recall that God made us and also provided us with what we need to live an abundant life, including nutritious healthy food and a Sabbath (day of rest).

INTRODUCTION:

Why are you worth the effort of “sacrifice” (*Is it really sacrifice?*) and doing what is healthy for abundant life and that of your family, your church and beyond? To explore the answer to this important question through the Bible Study series for the ALIVE! Congregational Health Initiative we will start our spiritual journey in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis.

In Session 1 you will explore the beginning of narrated and written documentation from the ancient writer of this text about the start of the relationship between God and humankind (Gen. 1:26-2:3, 7). What does it mean to be made in the image and likeness of God, and what might that mean for you and for all of us collectively as ones having “*dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth*” as stated Gen. 1:28b? Genesis 1:29-30 also introduces you to the God of Provision, (*Jehovah Jireh*) as you discover that God put everything on, in and surrounding this beautiful Earth that is needed for survival and thriving.

This session will introduce you to a perspective of who and Whose you are and how that understanding might influence your actions for your own health, for that of your communities, and beyond.

BACKGROUND TO TODAY’S LESSON:

Today’s lesson focuses on the beautiful and rich Creation Story and of **humankind’s place and purpose as a part of the creative accomplishments of God**. Humankind was not the first creation in our cosmos that God put in place. In God’s order of our universe, humankind came into being on the sixth day in God’s time. The Creation Story is full of wonder, power, and care as God put all things in right order preparing for all of the living creatures that would inhabit the earth, seas, and sky.

- On Day One God created LIGHT and separated it from the darkness and called the light “day” and the darkness “night.”
- On Day Two God separated the waters that were above the dome from those under the dome. The dome God called “sky.”
- On Day Three God separated the waters He called “seas” and exposed dry land that the Creator called Earth. Then God called forth vegetation: “...*seed bearing plants and trees on*



the land that bear fruit from seed in it, according to their various kinds.” (Note: Before the flood, humans were vegetarians, provided food by God’s “planting” from two Mediterranean crops – grains and fruits – as described here for Day Three of Creation.

- On Day Four God created the sun, the moon, and the stars, night and day, and the seasons.
- On Day Five God created all things that lived in the seas and the birds that flew through the air and God said, *“Be fruitful and multiply...”*
- On Day Six God created living creatures of every kind on the land - *“cattle and creeping things, and wild animals of the earth of every kind.”* On that same Day Six God created humankind *“in the image and likeness of God”* (Gen. 1:26) and had made provisions on Day Three for nutritious food to sustain all living creatures, including human beings (vv. 11, 12).
- Then, on Day Seven God rested from the labors of creation.

- **The final scripture regarding the creation of humanity occurs in Gen. 2:7** when *’adam* was formed from *“the dust of the ground, and (the LORD God) breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became of living being.”* (Note: *’adam* is the Hebrew word for man, mankind, and humanity. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the first human, the first of humankind is called Adam.)

GENESIS 1:26-2:3:

- Gen. 1:26 – *“...Let us make humankind in our image...likeness... (to have) dominion over...”*
 - ***“Let us...”*** – The use of **“us”** and **“our”** may refer to divine or heavenly court as reinforced by such usage in Job 38:7, Kings 22:19, and Jer. 23:18-23.¹ God speaking of God’s self in the plural form should not feel strange to followers of Jesus Christ because we refer to the Trinity as ***“Father, Son, and Holy Ghost/Spirit”*** and sometimes with the more contemporary language of ***“Creator, Redeemer, Counselor God.”*** Thus, the Christian consideration of **“us”** and **“our”** is not to be confused with the Greek gods, such as Zeus and his court.
“...in our image... likeness” – ***“Image”*** and ***“likeness”*** are not to be taken literally, but rather as a manifestation of God’s nature. In so doing, God gave responsibilities to humankind to have dominion over the earth all living things. This dominion does not mean to have power over or to be oppressive or self-centered, but rather to have a love for the earth and all within. To ***“have dominion over”*** implies to provide care, protection, and provision for all living creatures on land, in the seas and in the air. Consequently, God expects human beings to be responsible in all of our actions to protect each other, all creatures and the environment.

¹ Fretheim, Terrence E., The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes, Abington Press, Nashville, 1994, Vol. 1, The Book of Genesis, p. 345

- Gen. 1:27 – “...*male and female He created them.*” This wording is reinforced in Gen. 5:2-3 which states, “...*When God created humankind, He made them in the likeness of God. Male and female He created them, and He blessed them and named them “Humankind” when they were created.*” **Although both male and female are to reflect the images – nature -- of God, and their responsibilities for the earth and its creatures are the same, their roles in life are not to be viewed as identical.** For the purposes of community and family their roles are distinctive, such as their roles in the procreation of humankind. **They both, male and female, partner with God for the on-going creation of humankind** and the protection of all living things. The family unit roles may be different but man and woman, **yet husband and wife work as one unit** to secure and nurture the immediate and extended family so that all have value and purpose in the family.
- Gen. 1:28 – “...*be fruitful and multiply... fill the earth and subdue it ... have dominion over ...*” Professor Terence E. Fretheim, Professor of Old Testament, Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, Saint Paul, MN, describes the relationship of male and female to God in a way that celebrates who humankind is as made in the image and likeness of God. He states, “*The involvement in the creative process of those created in the divine image takes the form of a command (1:28). These first divine words to human being are about their relationship not to God, but to the earth. (These words) constitute a sharing of the exercise of power (“dominion over, be fruitful, multiply). From the beginning of time God chooses not to be the only one who has or exercises creative power. The initiative has been solely God’s, but once the invitation has been issued, God establishes a power-sharing relationship with humans.”² From this perspective it is important to appreciate that you, each human being has the creative, and empowering spiritual DNA to make conscious choices about your behavior that allows for your own health and wellness and that of all creatures, and the planet. The consciousness and responsibility were with human beings from the beginning of humankind.*
- Gen. 1:29 - 30 – God declares His provision of nutrients to sustain this created life for humankind and all creatures of the earth. **God provided (on Day 3)“every plant yielding seed... every tree with seed in its fruit” for humans. In this way, God has provided a way for humankind to eat, and also to plant seeds for vegetables, fruits , and other crops for your ongoing nutrition and sustenance.** For all other creatures God provided from the abundance of the earth’s foods for them as well. Our ancestors, even recent ones, ate most of their plant foods directly from the earth – green, leafy and colorful vegetables, seeds, grains, nuts, and fruits. Today’s markets have many “foods” that are scientifically engineered (e.g., corn) and other processed foods that are full of artificial substances to make them look and taste appealing yet are greatly reduced in nutritional value. **God designed you and God designed the foods for you that would provide the nutrients your body needs in order to function at its optimal best.**
- Gen. 1:31 – God sees that all is good that has been created on the sixth day.



- Gen. 2:1-3 – God reviews all that has been done and then God rests. This does not mean that God is no longer involved in creative acts. This part of the creative action is now completed, however, and so it is time to pause to rest. Throughout the Judeo-Christian understanding of God and our/your relationship with God, **you, too, are to pause from your labor on the seventh day or Sabbath, to set aside time for rest and replenishment and for corporate and private devotions and resting in the Spirit of The One who called you into being.**
- Gen. 2:7 – “...*then the LORD God ... breathed into the man’s nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.*” God breathed divine breath/Spirit, into the humankind. God put into the human God’s Self in the inescapable form of the Holy Spirit of God which made the man to be in the image and likeness of God. God continues that creative force of this Spiritual DNA in you and in each of us as gifts and talents, and as those things that are of God that allow you and all of humankind to be procreators with God for the building up of humanity and the earth. **You, as offspring of Adam, are endowed with that same breath/Spirit, that same Spiritual DNA that God breathed into Adam.** Dr. Erin Emery, Assistant Professor, Rush University, Department of Behavioral Sciences, upon reading this remarked, “*We can all pause, take a breath at any time, and renew God’s divine breath to help us make our next choice. We do not have to wait until tomorrow to start over. We can start over with each new breath.*”

PERSONAL REFLECTION:

During the week prior to Session One take time to write down what new things you have learned about God, yourself, and your relationship with God from reading Gen. 1:26-31 and Gen. 2:7. How do these new understandings support ALIVE! in your life?

CLASS DISCUSSION: (In small groups of 2 or 3)

1. What does this lesson teach you about your relationship with God, yourself, and others?
2. What does this lesson teach you about your responsibility for keeping/attaining an abundant life?
3. What are some new responsibilities about your health that you now understand and accept since your reflection of this Genesis scripture?
4. What is the first step you are going to take to incorporate your new understanding into your daily routine to get closer to your abundant life?

PLENARY SESSION TO DISCUSS SMALL GROUP FINDINGS

CLOSING REMARKS AND PRAYER