



IN THE
BEGINNING GOD
CREATED THE
HEAVENS AND
THE EARTH.

GENESIS 1:1

GRACE

IN CREATION

DATE

January 4 & 5

WEEK

1 of 4

KEY VERSE

Genesis 1:1

SETTING THE STAGE

The stage is simple; darkness, emptiness, vast void. Then it happens, God creates. And that is where it all begins.

Have you ever arrived at the movie theater after the movie already started? It may be just 5-10 minutes into the movie, but the story has begun, the characters have been introduced, and the context has been set. You spend the next 10-15 minutes trying to figure who goes with whom, where they are and what they want to accomplish. You end up trying to catch up and understand that which was made clear from the beginning, which you missed.

It is the same way for many people in life, especially at the beginning of the year wondering if this year is going to be different. Is this year going to be better? Is this year going to be more meaningful? Is my story going to be clearer this year? There are those who struggle to make sense of their own story because they have missed the beginning of it.

How does that happen? They were there when they were born obviously. But what about the beginning of all beginnings. Without a proper understanding of God and how we came into existence, we will never understand the purpose of our lives and how the story is supposed to unfold.

Today we are going to begin the story at the very beginning. We are going to focus on the first act of HIS story, with not just an actor or producer, but with the Creator: God Himself.

LESSON OUTLINE

1. The God of Grace
2. The Light of Grace
3. The Handiwork of Grace

THINGS TO KNOW

- Hebrew word for "ground" is Adamah
- Hebrew word for "man" is Adam
- From Adamah God made Adam

GRACE

IN CREATION

1. THE GOD OF GRACE

We will begin God's story at the most logical of places, the beginning. Ray Stedman writes "We must remember, as we study, that Genesis is the first chapter of the story that ends with the presentation of the Lord Jesus Christ and the declaration of the way God has found to obtain the release of human life from despair and death, and to bring it into power, excitement, and grace. In other words, the God of Genesis is the God of the rest of the Bible."¹

So often, we think the God of the New Testament is the God of Grace and the God of the Old Testament is the God of Judgment. We will see today and, in the weeks, to come that from the very beginning of the story, God is a God of Grace; and within the grace of God there will be boundaries and ultimately consequences, even judgment. God is love (1 John 4:16) and that love is demonstrated both through His grace and His judgment. In this lesson, we see that love manifested through His gracious gift of creation.

The first four words of the entire Bible introduce us to the primary character of the story, and the next six words lay the foundation.

Warren Weirsbe writes, "When He wrote the Bible, God didn't give us a ponderous theology book divided into sections labeled God, Creation, Man, Sin, and so forth. Instead, He gave us a story, a narrative that begins in eternity past and ends in eternity future."

GENESIS 1:1 *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

Countless books have been written and rewritten based on these ten words. Debates have been held for centuries based on these ten words. These ten simple words provide the main character and foundation of our story. Not just the story of God, but collectively "our" story.

You and I were not in the beginning, we were created. All that we can see, hear and touch were not in the beginning, but created. Civilizations, leaders, industries, boundaries and countries were not in the beginning, but created.

The first few words of our story are based on this presupposition: God and only God was in the beginning. There is nothing that expands on that truth. There is no fanfare, no trumpets, no explanation; rather very plainly and deliberately the Bible says, "*In the beginning God.*" In its simplicity we find complexity. Our finite minds want to focus on the tangibles of a specific start and specific end. We can understand that which is finite, we struggle with the understanding of the eternal; that which has no beginning and no end.

Even Moses struggled to recognize this when he wrote Psalm 90.

PSALM 90:2 *Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.*

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¹ Ray C. Stedman; *Authentic Christianity*, Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1996.

² Warren Wiersbe, *Be Basic (Genesis 1-11)*, David C. Cook, 2010.

Thus, our story starts in eternity past, in the beginning God. And from that beginning we see the grace of God in action with the very next word: created.

In the beginning God created. Everything that exists is because God, in His grace, created the heavens and the earth. There is nothing that has ever existed that did not exist without this foundational truth of the story. God is Creator and throughout the entire Bible, writers, prophets, leaders, kings, priests and even shepherds recognized that truth.

The foundation of our story is laid, now let's see how it unfolds.

GENESIS 1:2 *The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.* ³*Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.* ⁴*And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness.*

If you simply look at verse 2 isolated, it would be scary. The earth had no structure, no form, no real purpose; there was simply darkness on the surface of the deep.

From the beginning of creation there was darkness. Darkness can be scary, intimidating and even overwhelming at times. Darkness can also be overpowering.

There are people of all ages who sleep at night in the darkness, but not without a nightlight. There is often times a fear associated with darkness. The beginning was chaos; dark, void and formless.

If the work of grace in the soul is a new creation, this chaos represents the state of an unregenerate graceless soul: there is disorder, confusion, and every evil work; it is empty of all good, for it is without God; it is not only dark, it is darkness itself. This is our condition by nature, till almighty grace effects a blessed change. ³

And it was in the midst of the darkness that the Spirit of God was moving and hovering over the surface of the waters. There is a sense of anticipation of what the Spirit of God will do in the midst of this darkness. I picture in my mind's eye a low-lying fog that is hovering over the water, surrounding and covering the darkness in all directions as far as you can see. Darkness that intimidates and overwhelms. Darkness that hides, covers, and even overpowers. And yet, the darkness is not alone; the Spirit of God is moving and hovering with anticipation expressing a hint of grace.

Consider that from the very beginning of the story, even in the midst of the darkness, we are introduced to the fullness of God. God, the Creator was in the beginning. But before anything took shape, in the midst of the darkness we are introduced to the Spirit of God hovering and moving over the water. The activity of God's Spirit is the greatest word of comfort that human beings can know. He moved upon the face of the waters indicating that the chaos is not the final story. ⁴ The Spirit of God present at creation does not allow darkness to win. It does not allow darkness to intimidate or overpower. The presence of the Spirit of God shows that God wants to be ever present. In the midst of our darkness and challenges; in the midst of our chaotic circumstances; in the midst of when we are feeling void, God shows His grace and wants to be present with us.

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³ Matthew Henry, Commentary, Genesis 1, www.second.org/teachers.

⁴ Dr. James Dixon, *Genesis: Expository Thoughts*, Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2005.

Clearly, we see God and the Spirit in Genesis 1, but if we look at John 1:1-3 we see that Jesus was there also in the beginning.

JOHN 1:1-3 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.² He was in the beginning with God.³ All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.*

Pause for a moment to consider that God is complete with no need of anything or anyone. He is God; the Hebrew word used is *Elohim*, which is used in Genesis 1 in the plural form 32 times and means “All Powerful God.” As *Elohim*, He lacks nothing, yet bestows grace to us through creation.

As His story unfolds over these next 12 months, we will see that God, the Creator is the Father. God, the Son is Jesus. God, the Spirit is the Holy Spirit. But we capture a bit of that triune truth here in Genesis.

And it is the grace of God that creation even took place. In the midst of the darkness, the Spirit of God moved in such a way as to be ever present hovering over the water, not being consumed by the darkness. God desired there to be structure, purpose and relationship. God did not need creation, yet by His grace He created. He did this while the Spirit of God was hovering over the water in the darkness with anticipation.

Several years ago, I went spelunking for my very first time in some caves in Missouri. It was as dark as you can imagine. In fact, no one was allowed to go inside without a personal flashlight. The camp leaders knew that it was so dark in there that without light it would be not only scary, but dangerous. There was a need for light in order to proceed moving forward. Once our group got into a certain spot in the cave, our guide asked us all to turn off all the flashlights. It was pitch black. Even though I knew who was next to me, I could not see them; I could not see my hand in front of my face. The only thing that brought comfort was light. There was a collective sigh of relief when after a few minutes the guide said, “let there be light” and he turned his flashlight on.

2. THE LIGHT OF GRACE

While the Spirit of God was hovering over the water in the darkness with anticipation; it was at that moment of anticipation that everything changed. The grace of God changes everything with four spoken words; “*Let there be light.*” In the midst of the darkness with the Spirit of God moving over the surface of the waters, a candle was lit for all eternity. God did not have to use His hands or tools; God merely spoke, and light was created, and it was good. Light, in fact is not only good, it is essential to life. Light is the main source of energy for all organisms. Light is something we need yet often take for granted. However, every time we see light it should be a reminder of the grace of God in creation.

Light would come to be a reminder of the presence of God (*1 John 1:5*), the promise of God (*1 Peter 2:9*), the plan of God (*Psalms 119:105*) and the power of God (*Psalms 27:1*) Light would even be used to describe Jesus, the Son of God.

JOHN 1:4-5 *In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.⁵ And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.*

In John chapter 3, after the infamous verse of John 3:16 we find these words concerning light in the following verses as Jesus continues to dialogue with Nicodemus, ironically during the darkness of night.

JOHN 3:19-21 *And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.²⁰ For everyone practicing evil hates the light*

and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹ But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

From the beginning of creation there was always meant to be light. The very first thing God speaks into creation is light and that changes everything. God chose not to leave earth formless and void in darkness. God chose not to let His creation be overwhelming, intimidating and scary. God chose to show grace. God chose to say, “*let there be light*” and there was light.

GENESIS 1:5 *God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So, the evening and the morning were the first day.*

The separation has been defined and named. Light will be called Day. Darkness will be called Night. It was in this part of creation that God begins a pattern of separation. Not only did God separate light from darkness/day from night. He also separated the waters above from the waters beneath (v. 6-8) and separated the land from the waters (v. 9-10). Later in the story of God in the Bible, He separates His people (Israel), from the nations around them (*Exodus 34:10-17*). In the Gospel of Matthew, He separates the sheep from the goats (*Matthew 25:31-46*).

Notice that although there is light and darkness there is not a sun or moon yet; that comes in day four. To be honest it is not clearly stated the source of the light on the first day. However, it is noted clearly at the end of the story that God Himself is light.

1 JOHN 1:5 *This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.*

REVELATION 21:23 *The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.*

On day one of creation it is like God allowed His glory to shine forth in such a way to bear light on that which was dark. He continued that process throughout the story, culminating in what will be our heavenly home as portrayed in Revelation. The grace of light shines for eternity.

3. THE HANDIWORK OF GRACE ---

We have seen the God of Grace, the Light of Grace which shined throughout creation in days one through five. Now in day six of creation we see the Handiwork of Grace in both male and female.

The beginning of day six is the creation of animals.

GENESIS 1:24-25 *Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind;” and it was so. ²⁵ And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.*

The animals were created each according to its kind, each with purpose and each was good. But then in verse 26, on the same day God creates man and woman.

GENESIS 1:26-28 *Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” ²⁷ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. ²⁸ Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”*

Though we will not dive into it, we should take notice of the plural nouns here, “*our image*” and “*our likeness*,” which does not state clearly the Trinity, but it does support the Trinity as we have seen in looking at Genesis 1 thus far in conjunction with John 1:1-3. The plural pronoun usage here is unique to the creation story, which makes sense when we consider what is being created.

To look more closely at this part of creation let’s look at Genesis 2, which allows us to zoom in on parts of creation from chapter one.

GENESIS 2:7 *Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.*

From the dust of the ground, from that which God had created; He formed man. The Hebrew word for “ground” is “*Adamah*.” The Hebrew word for “man” is “*Adam*.” So, from *Adamah*, God made *Adam*.

The Hebrew word translated “formed” means like a pottery with clay, shaping and molding.

Notice that this is the only part of creation where God gets His hands dirty, if you will. There is an intimacy to this part of creation that exists nowhere else in the previous things created. God wanted to purposely form, mold and shape us into His likeness, making us unique and above all other creations.

David would note it like this in Psalm 139:

PSALMS 139:13-14 *For You **formed** (same word as Genesis 2:7) my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb. ¹⁴ I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;*

God got personal when He created man. He did not just speak, but He interacted. With great care and deliberation God formed, shaped and molded man in His image. Not necessarily in the physical image, but notice what God does once man is formed.

GENESIS 2:7B *...breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.*

The word used for breathed, is literally “exhaling a breath.” This part of creation sets us apart from all other living, breathing creatures. God breathed the “*breath of life*” into us which made us not only physical beings but spiritual beings.

IN GENESIS 1:26, when God said, “Let Us make man in our image, according to Our likeness...”

I do believe this is a reference to the Trinity, again not camping here but touching on it. This part of creation is the essence of God’s grace. This is the embodiment of God’s grace, literally and figuratively.

Because as we zoom in on this part of creation, it is clear that we as human beings are different and unique from all other creation. We are created in the image of God, the fullness of God. God the Father, God, the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. When we think of these verses it should remind us of the mind, body and spirit. This is what separates us from any other creature.

Unlike the angels and animals, humans can have a very special relationship with God. He not only gave us personality – minds to think with, emotions to feel with, and wills for making decisions – but He also gave us an inner spiritual nature that enables us to know Him and worship Him. ⁵

In days one through five God said what He created was “*good*.” On day six, when He created man in His image, He said it was “*very good*.” (*Genesis 1:31*)

God breathed not just life, but spirit into each one of us. We are reminded with this picture of creation that God wanted to be involved in our lives from the very beginning. God, by His Grace, chose to get His

⁵ *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary; Complete Old Testament*, Colorado Springs, CO; David C. Cook, 2007, p. 16.

hands dirty when He created man in His image both male and female. God created us for relationship with Him; and it all started “*In the Beginning.*”

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

The Story of God begins in the beginning as does our individual stories. God created light that changed everything. Though God could have merely spoken man into existence like He did everything else. Even with the animals, that came out of the earth, God utilized the earth and not His hands in their creation. But with you and me and all humankind, we were unique from the beginning. By the Grace of God, He had something different in mind for us from the beginning. God was willing to get His hands dirty with us from the beginning, which is a clear picture of His grace in action.

As we start this new year; it is a time to reflect and renew. This is a new year, a new beginning, a new opportunity. Let this year be a year where you allow God to get His hands dirty in the shaping and forming of your life, your priorities, your relationships. Allow the grace of God to do a life changing work in you from the inside out; so that you may be His light in this dark world.

This year, let His Story shape Your Story. Let His Plan shape Your Purpose.