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# thrive

NOV'19-JAN'20

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# THIS ISSUE

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## BEGINNINGS

- a journey through genesis

In this issue of *Thrive* we will be taking a reflective journey through the amazing stories of the book of Genesis.

We will draw out of this book the message so foundational to the rest of the Bible. Reading this ancient book is not as easy as it might seem. We often read the stories in isolation, but my hope is that we will be able to feel the impact of each of the stories as they emerge out of the broader theme of Genesis.

We will reflect on the message of the stories and consider them along with insights from the ancient historical context of Genesis. I am confident that you will see this book in a new light. The Bible is revelation from God. It is my desire as you read it, together with *Thrive*, that you will be equipped to engage and respond to this revelation. Please join me.

MJ

## Genesis 1

Genesis 1 was written to tell us two key things: who *God is* and who *we are* in relation to God. There is one sovereign creator God and we are his children. Nowhere else in the ancient world do we have such a radical confession of monotheism together with such a high dignity ascribed to mankind. The author contrasts the one almighty God with the many local gods of the ancient world, which were often identified with sun, moon and stars. These things are not gods, we are told, but created *by* God. Many ancient peoples worshipped the sun as the highest of the gods because the sun was seen as the source of light and light was associated with *life*. Genesis 1, however, depicts the creation of light on the first day and the creation of the sun on the fourth day, a mere light bearer. The account begins with the earth being 'formless and empty' with waters covering the earth. This, according to ancient symbolism, denote a lifeless 'primeval chaos'. The rest of the chapter then shows how God brings order and purpose to what was initially formless and empty. The author uses the repetition of certain motifs to convey the idea of sovereign authority and order. There is the motif of *separating* this from that, and the repeated notion of things being created "*according to their kinds*". Then there is the constant action of naming. These are all expressions of God's sovereign imposition of order on chaos. This isn't just something that God did then, it is what God does now. Without God's rule and order, our lives descend into chaos.

### Read Genesis 1

Think about where your life needs God's order and purpose. Ask God to show you what needs to be done and to bring this about.

## What is Man? Genesis 1 &amp; Psalm 8

“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!” (1 John 3:1). John is not espousing some new Christian idea here. When mankind is first introduced in Genesis 1, they are introduced as God’s children. When the writer of Genesis talks about man being made in God’s image (1:26-27) he is denoting a direct progenitor, what in scientific terms we would see as the transmission of our DNA through reproduction. This is clear from Genesis 5:3 where it says of Adam’s relationship to his son, Seth, “He had a son in his own likeness, in his own image”. The writer expresses the familial relationship like this to make an important theological point, not only about human identity, but also our *role*. We are the representatives of God in the world, to each other and to the rest of creation. Ancient Near Eastern kings used to set up images of themselves in conquered territories to stake their claim in those areas. The images were symbols of the king’s authority. So, when people rebelled against that king, the first thing they would do was to deface the image. God’s image in mankind has been defaced. Do you feel defaced? Christ came to restore you and he is, by his Spirit, restoring the DNA of God’s character in you again. Don’t live like an animal. You are a human being with a high purpose. Step up into your relationship with God, enjoy life with him and, in this way, you will radiate his glory. Your joy in God will be a light to the world.

Read **Genesis 1** again and **Psalm 8**.

Give thanks to God for his love and the world he has created for us to enjoy. How can you live for your higher purpose as God’s child today?

Genesis **1:3-2:3**,  
Exodus **20:8-11** & Isaiah **58:13-14**

The climax of the creation week was the seventh day when God rested. This resting is not a rest of inactivity but a rest of authority. It is often said of kings that when they had established their authority over their enemies in a certain realm they would have 'rest' (e.g. 2 Samuel 7:1). After the sixth day, once God had made man, who was the crowning glory of his creation, we read that God looked over everything he had created and saw that "it was very good". Hence, the seventh day was the day when God stopped to engage with his handiwork and in particular his children. God enacted things in this way in order to set a pattern for human life. In all the busyness of life we must stop regularly and engage with God. We must learn to take 'sabbaths'. The fourth commandment in fact tells us to observe sabbaths as the climax of our weeks. I think we should indeed set aside a day a week, together with our community, to enjoy God and one another, but I also think that we should set aside regular sabbaths during the week. The point is to get into the habit of stopping to engage with God and with people to bless and be blessed. This might be at night or it might be early in the morning. You might recognise a sabbath between meetings on a busy day when you can pop out for a walk. Whatever form it takes, just remember to do it because God says we should punctuate our busyness in this way.

Read Genesis 1:3 to 2:3, Exodus 20:8-11 and Isaiah 58:13-14  
Think about how often you take sabbaths. Think about how you can do this more regularly.

Genesis 2  
& Deuteronomy 30:11-20

Some people feel that Genesis 2 should be read as a myth because the whole scenario with the two trees in the garden just seems like a fanciful story. I disagree, because this scenario is typical of how God does things according to Scripture. God is using symbols to enact something in relation to his people, something which we see him doing all through Scripture. Circumcision, the temple, the sacrifices, baptism and the Lord's Supper are all symbols by which God enacts things. God uses symbols as the means by which we can make our choices. He wants the options to be very clear and so he wraps them up in symbols. How you then regard the symbol is indicative of the choice you make in relation to God. The *tree of life* represented what God wanted for his people and *the tree of the knowledge of good and evil* represented what God did *not* want for his people (Genesis 2:9, 16-17). The two trees represented a choice. God was giving man the opportunity to love him. Now that God had created man, given him the highest position in his creation and lavished good things upon him, what would man's response be? God wanted a clear response and so he set before them the two trees. Would man accept God as his God, love him and submit to his care? Or would he reject God? This is a choice we have to make every day. We make decisions all the time, big or small, between these two trees. Be aware of your choices and choose well today.

Read Genesis 2 along with Deuteronomy 30:11-20

Think about the choices you made yesterday, talk to God about them. Then pray that God would make today's choices clear to you and help you to choose well.

## Genesis 3

Genesis 1 was all about God establishing his *order* in creation. The creation account goes from primordial chaos to divine order. In Genesis 3, things turn the other way: from order back to chaos. Everything is flipped upside down. Man was created as the ruler over creation but here the lowest of all animals holds sway over him. The environment of peace where God and man are at rest now becomes a situation of conflict (3:15). The primary relationship, that between man and woman, is no longer one of love but one of domination (3:16). The world no longer yields joy for man, but hardship (3:17-19) and man who came from dust to life, will now go back to dust. Soon everything will go back to the watery chaos of Genesis 1:2 (see Genesis 6-8: the flood). Everything is reversed. But note how this happened. It happened because human beings abdicated their position of authority. Adam and Eve should have driven the serpent out as part of their continual responsibility of maintaining order. (Note: In Ancient Near Eastern mythology, Tiamat, the god of the primordial chaos is often depicted as a serpent.) When they are called to account, in order of responsibility, they each blame the next. The man blames the woman and the woman blames the serpent. This abdication of responsibility signifies a relinquishment of authority. The good news is that God has reversed this reversal in Christ. Through him we can step up into our place of authority. We do this by taking responsibility. When you take responsibility you also step into a position of authority.

### Read Genesis 3

Do a stock take on the order of your values and priorities to see if your life reflects what is happening in this chapter. Ask God to turn you around.

Throughout Genesis 1 we have the repeated statements, “God said... and it was so”. Here in Genesis 3:1-5, Satan (the serpent, cf. Revelation 20:2) calls the word of God into question. This is the first step of the great reversal back into chaos and it relates to a central theme in Scripture. The whole Bible is structured along a promise-fulfilment pattern. It is structured this way to show us that *God is always true to his word*. If God says something, it will be so. To live with God, therefore, is to live in constant anticipation of the fulfilment of his word. This is faith. The ‘original sin’ here in Genesis 3 is *doubt*. Mankind had no *reason* to doubt God; this doubt was not an intellectual doubt based on lack of evidence. This was a doubt motivated by the promise of godlike knowledge (verse 5: “You will be like God, knowing good and evil”). Before this Adam and Eve were in a state of innocence. It never occurred to them to not trust God. They were like little children (cf. Matthew 18:3) without a shred of doubt in their father’s faithfulness and love. They lived by faith. Satan’s scheme was designed to make them doubt God and, in this way, they lost their innocence. Through Jesus Christ we are reconciled with God and through him we can be restored to this life of childlike faith. Satan will try to make you doubt God’s love and faithfulness, but you must stand firm in faith. Live your life in constant anticipation of the fulfilment of God’s word.

Read Genesis 3

Ask God to fulfil his purpose today in specific areas of your life.

The Story of Cain and Abel demonstrates the legacy of the fall in the dysfunctionality of human relationships. In this story, Cain sees his brother Abel as someone to compete with rather than someone whose successes could be celebrated. The corruption of human nature is seen here in the way that one man views the other. Cain is unable to enjoy the success of his brother. Rather, he is filled with envy to the point where he actually kills his brother. This has the effect of intensifying the consequences of the fall. Cain is condemned thereby to be a restless wanderer on earth. By acting upon his envy, he gave this sin power over him. He has been mastered by sin and so he becomes subject to his disorientated passions, condemned to live in the tormenting emptiness of perpetual dissatisfaction. What a sad story! Unfortunately, it is the story of too many people. When we abandon the wonderful destiny that God has for us and take our lives into our own hands, we become empty and restless. Are you suffering from this? Here are some criteria for you to diagnose yourself: Are you able to enjoy the successes of those close to you even when you lack? Are you at rest in contentment or are you agitated by the restlessness of envy? Do you begrudge others the things that you cannot have yourself? Do you flaunt the blessings that you have before those who have less? Are you like Cain or have you taken the opportunity that you have in Christ to rise above this and live in joy and contentment in your God-given purpose?

Read Genesis 4

Let God search your heart on these things  
and change the way you view the people around you.