



“Creation” Genesis 1

Idea: God beautifully created man to worship and enjoy Him.

Intro: Everyone loves a good story. Whether it is a well-written novel by an author such as J. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Steven King, or Nicholas Sparks or a heart-warming movie on Hallmark, we love to engross ourselves in a good story. Why, though, do we love a story? Have you ever thought about it? Why do our kids love to have a bedtime story read to them? What is it about a story?

I found an article on medium.com entitled, “The Science of Storytelling: Why We Love Stories.” Listen to what Joshua Van DeBrake says about storytelling.

“You have likely heard that storytelling is important for business, marketing, and for life in general. Likely, you’ve heard that it’s a powerful tool and that it has a potential for massive lasting impact. I am going to show you the science behind why we love stories so much, what gives them their unique power, and how you can capitalize on it almost immediately.

‘We are, as a species, addicted to story. Even when the body goes to sleep, the mind stays up all night, telling itself stories.’ —Jonathan Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*

There is a scientific explanation for our love of stories: when we hear a story that resonates with us, our levels of a hormone called *oxytocin* increase. Oxytocin is a “feel good” hormone. It boosts our feelings of things like trust, compassion, and empathy. It motivates us to work with others and positively influences our social behavior.

Because of this, stories have a unique ability to build connections. Great brands know this and tap into its power to build a base of engaged fans. Looking even deeper, when we hear facts, it activates the data processing centers in our brains, but when we hear stories, it activates the sensory centers in our brains.

A group of neuroscientists at Princeton University studied this:
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2922522/>

They found that, “*In agreement with previous work, the story evoked highly reliable activity in many brain areas across all listeners.*”

“Communication is a shared activity resulting in a transfer of information across brains. The findings shown here indicate that during successful communication, speakers’ and listeners’ brains exhibit joint, temporally coupled, response patterns.”

The speakers’ and listeners’ brains exhibited joint, temporally coupled, response patterns. Let’s break that down a little...

These neuroscientists found that when listening to a well-told story, the exact same areas of the brain light up on an MRI in both the storyteller and listener. Your brain, as the listener, mirrors the brain of the storyteller.

In other words, when you hear a well-told story, your brain reacts as if you are experiencing it yourself. Your brain places you inside the story.

Take a look at any Disney movie. Do you remember in *The Lion King*, when Scar forces Mufasa off the cliff into the sea of trampling wildebeests? And believing it was his fault, Simba exiles himself out of shame! How about the whole first 10 minutes of *Up*? Or literally any scene from *The Fox and the Hound*.

Humans are empathic creatures. And as such, we respond to stories because they cultivate emotion and a sense of togetherness—a connection. The simple personifying and humanizing of a cartoon character creates a connection with the audience. It causes the release of oxytocin and makes the audience place themselves into that character’s story, connecting on a deeper level.

Stories make us feel like part of something bigger than ourselves.”

Physiologically, this is why we love stories. I am of the deep conviction that the reason we are drawn to good stories is because we are part of a grand story. And we are striving to understand the plot, characters, and purpose of that story. Where is this story? It is found in God’s Word. The Bible is a compilation of stories written by nearly forty authors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit over a period of 1,500 years. And the metanarrative of the Bible involves God’s self-revelation to and redemption of man. The story of the Bible is about God revealing Himself to man in redemption.

Today, we are beginning a new sermon series entitled “The Story.” Over the next four Sundays, we will walk through the four scenes of this grand story, and we will discover that this story answers life’s most essential questions and gives a lasting sense of purpose and meaning. Then on Easter Sunday, we will conclude this series by looking at your story. After all, God’s desire is for His story to become your story.

We begin with Creation. Read Genesis 1:1-4, 31.

Inquiry: There are three philosophical questions that everyone ponders about their own existence. They are: “Who am I?”, “Where did I come from?”, and “Why am I here?”. Genesis answers these questions in the first chapter by introducing us to God as the Creator and revealing His creation as being good.

Genesis, which means “beginnings,” is a book of beginnings. It introduces us to the beginning of time and space. We learn in the first two chapters how the universe came into existence. And in its first words we learn how Israel’s God can be known. He reveals Himself in terms of the “when’s” and “where’s” of human life and history. Conceptually, this is how people orient themselves to their world. We locate ourselves in time in terms of our beginnings and endings. Our personal stories are also contoured by space...where we are. Thus as we see and identify ourselves by our finitude, so the Infinite One condescends by announcing His presence in the same terms – time and space. God is not merely an idea. He is Eternal Being whom we can know and experience personally. At the commencement of Scripture He invites us to learn of Him. Yet the full manifestation of the Unknown One awaited the Incarnate Word, who as Son is the “*exact imprint of His nature*” (Heb 1:3).

God introduces Himself to us in terms of time and space through His creation. Today, let's examine this event as we seek to understand the story of the Bible so that it becomes our story. In creation we first learn...

1. In the beginning there was God.

בראשית נרא אלהים (*Berasheth bara Elohim*).

The ESV translates this verse, “*In the beginning, God created...*” These opening words of Genesis form an independent clause, affirming that God was in the beginning before all things came into existence. They mark inauguration with an anticipation of the end. Throughout the Old Testament “beginning” is often paired with its antonym “end,” indicating an inclusive period of time. The occurrence of “beginning” suggests that it has been selected because of its association with “end.” If so, Moses, as the author, has at the outset shown that creation’s beginnings were initiated with a future goal intended, an eschatological purpose. Therefore, Moses introduces us to a big G god. He is One who as Sovereign knows and controls the end from the beginning (Is 46:10).

Let's look at this God's name. The term *Elohim* is exclusively used in Genesis 1:1-2:3. Then in 2:4 *Yahweh* is used in conjunction with *Elohim*. There are three names for deity in the Hebrew Bible: *El*, *Eloah*, and *Elohim*. Of the three names, *Elohim* by far is used the most (2,750x). It is a plural noun, and as a plural it can refer to pagan deities, in which case it is translated “gods.” Or it can refer to the God of Israel. When used of the One God, it commonly occurs in the Hebrew with singular verbs as it is found in Genesis 1:1. Many scholars attribute this grammatical use as an indication of honor or majesty.

Since its plurality does not designate more than one entity, its morphological (structural) shape does not necessarily refer to the plurality within the Godhead. It is unreasonable to burden this one word *Elohim* at this point in God's story with the developed view of the Christian Trinity in the New Testament. However, I do believe we see an early implication of a plurality within the Godhead in this term.

What else do we learn about this God from this opening clause? Let me point out three things.

1) He is self-existent.

Everything in the universe is dependent on some other thing or person. Animals, plants, and insects are all reproduced from others within their specific species. Light itself is contingent upon a light source. Every effect must have an adequate cause. But this is not true of the God who existed prior to the beginning of everything else. If God is the cause beyond everything, then it stands to reason that His existence cannot be found from that which originates from Him. He exists by His own power and wisdom.

2) He is self-sufficient.

Self-existence means that God has no origin. Self-sufficiency means that God has no needs and therefore depends on no one. This is not true of anything within creation. Plants require soil, water, carbon dioxide, and light to grow and reproduce. Animals require food, water, and air to live. If you go without oxygen for too long, you will die. We are also dependent on light, heat, gravity, and the laws of nature. If one of these get out of balance, we would all die immediately. This is not true of God. He needs nothing to exist, not even you or I.

3) He is eternal.

Again the mark of inauguration anticipates an end. The fact that God initiated the beginning means that He will still exist after the end. Therefore, He is eternal. His eternality suggests two consequences:

- God can be trusted to remain the same.

He is unchangeable in His attributes. He will always be holy, wise, gracious, just, loving, and everything else He has revealed Himself to be.

- God is inescapable.
You cannot ignore Him. You cannot move away from Him. You cannot hope He doesn't notice you. If you reject Him in this life, you will still face Him after death. He is inescapable.

The story begins with God, who has always been. He has always existed, and He has always existed exactly as He is now. If it seems confusing, it's because He is beyond what anyone can fully comprehend.

Secondly, we learn...

2. In the beginning God created.

בראשית ברא אלהים (*Berasheth bara Elohim*).

Bara is translated “created.” It is consistently used in the Old Testament in reference to a new activity. It contains the ideas both of complete effortlessness and *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing). The term is never connected to any statement of the material. Believing God's Word, the writer of Hebrews gave it precise explanation, “*By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible*” (Heb 11:3).

Genesis 1 and 2 describe God's creative activity. We see that in the beginning, God spoke and everything came into existence over six days. By His command, the entire universe was created and filled with a dramatic display of galaxies, stars, and planets – including Earth, on which was a perfect garden of paradise called Eden. Of all the beauty He created, the masterpiece was a man and a woman. God made Adam and Eve in His image to reflect Him. They were created with the grand purpose of worshipping Him by loving Him, serving Him, and enjoying relationship with Him.

This world was not an accident. God purposefully created all that there is, including you and me (Ps 139:14). Therefore, you and I have purpose and value. As humans we have been created in the image of God to reflect His glory and beauty. Do you see how our story finds its genesis in God's story?

The third thing we learn is...

3. In the beginning creation was good.

Read Genesis 1:31.

By God's design all of creation was in harmony and was exactly the way it was supposed to be. The breath of life was in man. Adam and Eve were given a dimension of life that was different and unique to humanity (2:7). They were privileged to rule over all creation as God's stewards (2:15, 19). And they enjoyed a personal relationship with God who would walk in the Garden with them (3:8). Creation was beautiful (2:9). It was nourishing and life-giving (2:9). It was refreshing (2:10). It was enriching (2:12). And it was relational (2:18, 20).

During this time there was no pain, suffering, sickness, or death. There was complete love, acceptance, and intimacy between God and man, between Adam and Eve, and throughout creation. Everything that God created was good.

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. – Col 1:16

You and I were created by God and for God. And our creation was different from the rest of His work. He breathed a special life into us, enjoys a special relationship with us, and has worked a special redemption for us that no other aspect of creation experiences...not even angels. Let us see and understand that in the beginning creation was good because God is good.

Conclusion: I believe it is safe to say that today it is hard for us to grasp this goodness. Our world is filled with cancer, disease, abuse, fraud, and shame. The beauty of 2:25 is foreign to our hearts. It is hard to imagine living in a world without shame. Our headlines are much different today than that of Eden's. They are filled with infidelity, exploitation, and scandal. We look around at our world and see nothing but brokenness, but it was not always like it is today.

The brokenness causes us to long for something new...something better...something good. That which we long for is God and His goodness. We long for the life that was breathed into Adam. We long to be released from the shame that consumes our lives. Into this brokenness, God inserts good news. This news is that you were made by God and for God. He loves you in your brokenness and shame. He loves you so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, to pay the penalty for your sin on the cross. And the Bible says that if you will place your faith in Him and turn from your sin, you can experience new life in Jesus (Rom 10:9-10). You can experience the good life God created you to enjoy.

This is God's story. Will you make it yours?