



WHO AM I ?

what the bible says about humanity





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STUDY ONE: I AM A CREATED PERSON

Genesis 2:4-7

1. If you were asked to articulate a Christian view of who you are as a human what key descriptions or categories would you use?
2. Read through and reflect on the following quote from Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Do you think that he is correct?

*Every ant knows the formula of its ant-hill.
Every bee knows the formula of its beehive.
They know it in their own way, not in our way.
Only humankind does not know its formula.*

3. Why do you think that it is important for Christians to have a well-articulated view of who we are as humans?

Read Genesis 1:1-2:3

4. What does this teach us about God the creator and his relationship to the rest of creation?
5. What do we learn about humans and their place in creation? [P.S. Don't spend too long on 'image of God' – that's for next week's study!]

Read Genesis 2:4-7

6. What are we meant to learn from the image given here of God forming the man from the earth?



7. What do the following passages contribute to this picture:
Isaiah 45:9-12
Isaiah 64:8
Romans 9:19-21
8. In what sense are humans continuous with and a part of the rest of creation? In what sense are we different?
9. How does a Christian view of creation differ from a secular or atheistic version of creation? What implications does this have for us as humans?
10. What are we meant to learn from the fact that God breathes life into the man to bring him to life?
11. Christians speak of God not only as the creator but also as the sustainer of the universe and of humanity. Read the following passages and reflect on what they teach us:
Nehemiah 9:6
Acts 17:25-28
Hebrews 1:1-3

THINKING IT THROUGH

12. Consider the following statements by John Calvin. What difference does being created people make to our understanding of ourselves?

Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid Wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But as these are connected together by many



ties, it is not easy to determine which of the two precedes and gives birth to the other. ...

[I]t is evident that man never attains to a true self-knowledge until he has previously contemplated the face of God, and come down after such contemplation to look into himself.

Read Psalm 139:13-18

13. What assurance can you take from the fact that God formed you and knows you intimately?

14. Turn the words of this Psalm into a prayer.





STUDY TWO: I AM MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

Genesis 1:26-31

1. What is different and unique about humans in relation to the rest of creation?
2. How do you personally think of yourself and your role in the creation that God has made?

Read Genesis 1:26-31

3. What elements are different in the account of God making people compared to the rest of creation? What is this meant to signify?
4. Why does God use the language 'let us make...'? Who is the 'us'?
5. Do you think 'image' and 'likeness' are different to each other or are they parallel expressions? Compare Genesis 5:1-3 to help you with this question.
6. What role does God particularly give to humankind? What is this supposed to look like in practice?
7. What do the three expressions in Genesis 1:27 indicate about the image of God? What does this demonstrate in particular about men and women?
8. How does the expression in Genesis 1:31 differ from the previous similar descriptions? What is significant about this difference?
9. Throughout church history there have been different understandings of what being made in God's image



means. Read through the following approaches. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each, and how well do they match the biblical evidence?

SUBSTANTIVE APPROACH

This viewpoint sees the image of God in a particular attribute or attributes, which make humans different from animals. Some examples of these attributes are intellect, the ability to reason, free will, and morality.

RELATIONAL APPROACH

This viewpoint locates the image of God in humanity's capacity for relationships, primarily, relationship with God and with other humans. To be human is to be in relationship.

FUNCTIONAL APPROACH

This viewpoint sees the image of God in the particular role that God gives humans in exercising dominion over creation. In the ancient world kings were often seen as 'images' of the gods and idols were also seen as 'images' of the god worthy of due reverence and respect.

10. Which of these viewpoints do you find most convincing? Is some synthesis of these views a better way forward?
11. How would you summarise what it means to be made in the image of God?

Read Genesis 9:6 & James 3:9

12. What are the implications of being made in the image/likeness of God for how we treat other human beings?



Read 2 Corinthians 4:4 & Colossians 1:15

13. What do these passages teach us about Jesus?
14. What are the implications of this for our understanding of humanity?

Read Romans 8:29, 1 Corinthians 15:49, Colossians 3:10

15. In what sense are we growing into the image of God/
image of the Son?
16. What is the ultimate goal for people created in the
image of God?





STUDY THREE: I AM A WHOLE PERSON

Psalm 84

1. What do you think people mean when they use the following expressions:
“My job is soul destroying”
“I bared my soul to him”
“It was a triumph of the human spirit”
“That music is spiritually uplifting”
2. How do you tend to think of component parts of your person like body, soul, spirit, mind etc.?
3. What has shaped your thinking in this area?

Read Psalm 84

4. What is this Psalm trying to express?
5. Look at v.2. How does the Psalmist express his deep desire for God? How do you understand the relationship here between ‘my soul’, ‘my heart’ and ‘my flesh’?

The Hebrew word for ‘soul’ here is *nephesh*, which can mean life, living being, inner life, self, and can be used for the seat of the appetites, the emotions, desires and passions.

6. Compare some other uses of *nephesh* in the following verses:

And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life (nephesh) in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

Genesis 1:30 (NIV)



Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (nephesh), and the man became a living being.
Genesis 2:7 (NIV)

But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood (nephesh) still in it.
Genesis 9:4 (NIV)

As her soul (nephesh) was departing (for she died), she named him Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin.
Genesis 35:18 (NRSV)

As she breathed her last—for she was dying—she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin.
Genesis 35:18 (NIV)

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul (nephesh), and with all your might.
Deuteronomy 6:5

I loathe my life (nephesh); I will give free utterance to my complaint; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul (nephesh).
Job 10:1

How would you summarise the use of nephesh in these representative instances? What does the term mean?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23

7. What is this verse saying? Does it suggest that humans can be divided into three distinct parts, body (the Greek



word is soma), soul (psyche) and spirit (pneuma)?

8. Compare other uses of soul & spirit in the following verses. What does this show about these terms?

John 12:27 & John 13:21

Luke 1:46-47

9. Does the bible suggest that humans are made up of two fundamental parts, a physical/material part (body) and a spiritual/immaterial part (soul/spirit) or are these simply different ways of looking at whole persons? Consider the following passages:

Matthew 10:28

Mark 10:30

1 Corinthians 15:20-23

APPLICATION

10. If God has made us as whole persons with different aspects to our humanity, what are the implications for:

Mission & Evangelism

Growing in personal godliness

Church life

11. How would you respond to the following statement by leading scientist Frances Crick?

“You”, your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behaviour of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules.

12. Pray, thanking God for who he has made you to be, you in your entirety, every aspect of your person.





STUDY FOUR: I AM A FALLEN PERSON

Genesis 3:1-24

1. Do you think people are basically good, basically bad, or somewhere in between?
2. How do you make sense of humanity's capacity for extraordinary evil and incredible heroism?

Read Genesis 3

3. What strategies does the Serpent use to tempt Eve?
4. How do you experience similar temptations in your own life?
5. What sin (or sins) do Adam and Eve commit by eating the fruit?
6. What are the consequences of sin for Adam and Eve?
7. How does Adam and Eve's sin have an impact on the rest of humanity? Read Romans 5:12, 18-19 to help with your discussions.
8. Does humanity's fall into sin mean that we are no longer God's image bearers? (Hint: read Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9). How does sin impact the image of God in humankind?
9. How deep-rooted is the problem of sin in humanity? Read Mark 7:20-23 to hear Jesus' assessment of humanity's problem.



10. How do you respond to the following quote by Russian novelist Alexander Solzhenitsyn:

Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either, but right through every human heart, and through all human hearts

11. How does sin affect

Our minds

Our wills

Our passions

Our conscience

12. It is common for people to say 'be true to yourself'. Is this good advice in light of the fallenness of humanity?

13. Returning to the first two questions, how does a worldview that holds together humans as created good in the image of God but broken and riddled with sin help us to make sense of the world around us?

14. Prayer together, being honest about your brokenness and sin and yet given thanks to God for his ongoing commitment to you as part of his good creation and made in the image of God.



STUDY FIVE: I AM A FREE PERSON

John 8:31-36

1. What does it mean for humans to be free?
2. Do you agree with the following quote?
Why or why not?

We live in an age whose chief moral value has been determined, by overwhelming consensus, to be the absolute liberty of personal volition, the power of each of us to choose what he or she believes, wants, needs, or must possess

David Bentley Hart 'Christ and Nothing'

3. Is freedom a good thing or a bad thing? Are there any situations in which we shouldn't be free to do whatever we want?

Read John 8:31-36

4. What does Jesus say is the pathway to true freedom?
5. How does holding to the teaching of Jesus, being his disciple, and obeying what he says bring freedom? Isn't it restrictive?
6. Why do the crowds react so negatively to what Jesus is saying?
7. Why is everyone who sins a slave to sin?
8. How have you experienced this reality of slavery in your own life?
9. How does Jesus free us from slavery to sin?



10. How does a biblical understanding of being human (created by God, made in his image, a whole person, a fallen person) help us to live as free people?
11. Is freedom really about doing whatever we want? Why or why not?
12. Consider the start of this prayer from the Anglican Prayer Book

O God, the author and lover of peace, in knowledge of whom stands our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom...

How is service of God perfect freedom? Isn't this a contradiction?

13. What are the areas of your life where you resent obedience to Jesus because you feel like it is restricting your freedom? Do any other group members have a story of how they found freedom through obedience in this area?
14. Pray together asking God to lead you into your true human freedom through obedience to Jesus



STUDY SIX: I AM IN CHRIST

Romans 8:1-18

1. How seriously has sin impacted our humanity? Consider the impact on us as:
 - Created People
 - People made in God's Image
 - Whole People
 - Free People
2. What sort of solution might be needed to overcome this?

Read Romans 8:1-18

3. How can Paul write 'Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (verse 1)? [You may like to read Romans 3:21-26 and Romans 6:23 to see some of the argument that leads to this 'Therefore...']
4. Is the Old Testament law good or bad? Why? What is the difference between the law of the Spirit and the law of sin and death?
5. What is meant when says that Jesus came 'in the likeness of sinful flesh'? How is this phrase different from 'in the likeness of flesh' or 'as sinful flesh'?
6. The early church articulated truths about the person of Jesus in the Nicene Creed. Read some of what it says about Jesus and discuss it together:



*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, light from light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and became truly human.*

7. What would be lost if Jesus was not fully God or not fully human?
8. How did God 'condemn sin in the flesh' (v.3). What is the relationship between sin being condemned in the flesh of Jesus and there being no condemnation for those of us who are 'in Christ Jesus'?
9. What is meant by the contrast between 'flesh' and 'Spirit'? Is this saying that our bodies are bad?
10. What does it look practically to 'live in accordance with the Spirit'? (v.5) Share at least one concrete thing that you do, or could do, to put this into practice.
11. If you are a follower of Jesus then 'the Spirit of him [God] who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you.' What confidence does that give you for (i) day to day life (ii) hope in the face of death?



12. Pray together using the following guidance for your prayers:

Thank Jesus, the perfect human, for all that he has achieved for us

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you live in accordance with his way and name a specific area that you want his help.

Thank God the Father that he has given you





STUDY SEVEN: I AM A CHILD OF GOD

Galatians 3:26-4:7

1. What words do you generally use when asked to describe your relationship with God? As a group make a list of these things.
2. Were the things on your list primarily negative (things that God has saved you from) or positive (things that God has given to you) or both?

Read Galatians 3:26-4:7

3. Paul uses the image of adoption as children to describe our relationship with God in this passage. How do we become children of God?
4. What is meant by each of the following aspects and benefits of adoption?
 - a. Being clothed with Christ (3:27)
 - b. Being 'all one in Christ Jesus' (3:28)
 - c. Being Abraham's seed (3:29)
 - d. Having God's Spirit in your heart (4:6)
 - e. Being able to call God "Abba, Father" (like 'daddy') (4:6)
 - f. Being a child and not a slave (4:7)
 - g. Being an heir (3:29; 4:7)



5. Which one of these things resonates most with you in your relationship with God at the moment? Why?
6. Does v.28 mean that our gender, work, ethnicity, and other aspects of our identity are irrelevant? Why or why not?
7. What strategies could you employ as a group or as individuals to make sure that you regularly acknowledge your status and identity as 'children of God'? i.e. Looking at yourself in the mirror each day and saying 'I'm a child of God!' (Or is that too corny??)
8. Pray together thanking God for the incredible privilege of being a son or daughter of God.



STUDY EIGHT: I AM A MAN OR A WOMAN

This is a slightly different study to the others in the series as it wrestles with a current issue in identity, that of gender identity and associated issues. It attempts to do this in light of the biblical story as unpacked through the previous studies.

1. What do you understand the following words/phrases to mean? How do they differ from each other?
 - a. Gender
 - b. Sex
 - c. Gender Stereotype
 - d. Sexual orientation

2. Choose one or more of the following scenarios for your group to consider (you could break up into smaller groups if you like). Then we will consider the scenario in light of aspects of biblical teaching. Don't worry if you don't know all the answers, the aim is to reflect theologically and biblically and to try and grow in understanding.
 - a. Trevor is a 22-year old member of our church. He is biologically male but feels that he is actually a woman who is trapped in a man's body. He says that he has felt this way since he was 6 years old.

 - b. Sue and Roger have just had their first child, who is intersex, genetically the child is female (XX) but has ambiguous genitalia. They are receiving various pieces of medical advice but they want to know what the bible has to say about this.



c. Melanie turns up to church in Sunday. She is a transsexual who had sex reassignment surgery in her twenties but now regrets it. She is interested in finding out more about Jesus but is worried that God and the church would not welcome her.

3. For each scenario consider what the following aspects of the biblical story have to contribute to our understanding. Make sure you read through the bible passages included but feel free to add other passages you think are relevant. [Note that this is primarily for our own thinking and understanding at this stage and may need to be adapted for what is pastorally helpful for the person.]

a. Human Beings are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27)

b. God made us as whole beings and loves our bodies, minds, emotions etc. (Psalm 139:13-14; 1 Tim 4:4; Mark 12:30, 1 Corinthians 6:13,16)

c. The creation and all human beings are broken and damaged due to the fall. The impact of sin affects all aspects of our personhood (Romans 8:20-21; Romans 1:21-23)

d. God saves us by his grace not by our works, he calls us his children and he gives us his Holy Spirit to transform us into the image of his Son. (Matthew 11:28; Ephesians 2:8-10; Galatians 3:26-28; Romans 8:5-8)

e. The great Christian hope is resurrection hope, the redemption of our bodies and all our personhood, and the restoration of all of creation (Romans 8:22-25; 1 Corinthians 15:42-49; Revelation 21:1-4)



4. To finish read through Acts 8:26-38 together. This is the first recorded non-Jewish convert to Christianity, someone who, as a eunuch, might be described in today's language as 'gender queer'. How is the gospel of Jesus good news for people who are men, women, children, intersex, gender dysphoric, transgender etc. etc.

5. Pray together asking God to transform:
 - a. our minds and give us wisdom for our complex world

 - b. our hearts and give us compassion and love for those who are different to us

 - c. our wills that that we would be steadfast and faithful to God's word

 - d. our whole selves that we would be conformed to the image of Jesus





STUDY NINE: I AM A GROANING PERSON

Romans 8:18-25

1. What tensions exist in the human person given that we are both created good in God's image and yet fallen into sin? What examples do you see of this?
2. Are these tensions fully resolved when we come to faith in Jesus? Why or why not?

Read Romans 8:18-25

3. How does v.18 express the tension between what we have now and what we are waiting for?
4. What is the creation groaning and waiting for?
5. What does this demonstrate about the relationship between humanity and the creation?
6. Why does having the 'first fruits of the Spirit' lead to groaning for Christians?
7. Do you resonate with this image of groaning? Share an example of how you experience this in your own life.
8. What is meant by the expression 'the redemption of our bodies' (v.23)? What exactly are we waiting for?

The Christian hope of resurrection is spelled out further in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul uses the image of a seed to portray both the continuity and discontinuity between our present bodies and our resurrection bodies: they are our bodies still but are radically transformed



Read 1 Corinthians 15:42-44

9. Describe what the following differences between our present bodies and resurrection bodies mean:

Perishable vs. Imperishable

Dishonour vs. Glory

Weakness vs. Power

10. The final difference is more difficult because it is translated as a physical (NRSV) or natural (NIV) body as opposed to a spiritual body. However, the contrast is literally a soulish (psychikos from 'psyche' meaning soul) body as opposed to a spiritual body. What distinction is being drawn here?

Read Romans 8:28-30

11. What is God's plan for those he predestined?
12. What does it mean to be 'conformed to the image of his Son'? Does this mean we lose our individual personality?
13. How does this bring together the various uses of the image of God that we have seen in this series?
14. Where do you most feel the tension between what we have now and what we are still waiting for at Jesus' return?



15. Pray together about these things, asking God especially:

For patience to continue to hope for what isn't seen

For his Holy Spirit to help us in our weakness

To help you to remember that all things work together
for good for those who love God and are called
according to his purpose



