

A Biblical View of God and Man

By Mike Wilkinson

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read the comments related to Exodus 3:1-17, especially verses 13-17, in the section **It's in the Book**. Also, read Acts 17:22-31. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: What does God reveal about Himself? Who is He, and what is He is like?

Assignment Two

Read Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9. Both passages forbid murder and slander because people bear the image of God. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: Were these commands given before or after the fall of man in the garden of Eden? Based on your answer, did the sin of Adam and Eve cause mankind no longer to carry the image of God?

Assignment Three

Read the comments related to Genesis 1:1–2:4, especially verses 26-31, in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: What does it mean for each person to be in God's image? What do these verses teach about the relationship between God and humanity?

Scripture to Memorize

"So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." Genesis 1:27

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand the significance of God's name and what it means for humanity to be in God's image.

Michael Wilkinson is dean of The College at Southwestern where he teaches theology and biblical studies. Before coming to teach at Southwestern, Michael served for over twenty years in local churches in Texas and Arkansas. He served most of those years as a single adult pastor and a missions pastor. His research interests include all areas of systematic theology and several periods of historical theology, especially the sixteenth-century Reformation and the early Anabaptists. He is the author of a work on one of these early sixteenth-century Anabaptist reformers, *A Necessary Smelting: Leonhard Schiemer's Theology of Suffering*.

In addition to theology, Dr. Wilkinson loves baseball and keeps a baseball glove in his office for any student who wants to come by and toss a ball around.

It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

You are with a group of friends when the discussion turns to spiritual things. One friend says, "I like to think that God is like my grandfather." Another says, "God is like the Big Cop in the sky." Another doesn't think it's possible to know anything about God, while another believes God is watching from a distance but not really involved. Then they ask you, "What do you think God is like?" What will you say?

Each view concerns the same two things: (1) who God really is; and (2) what humanity really is.

Read Exodus 3:1-17 and Acts 17:22-31 out loud.

Studying the Passage, Exodus 3

Verse 14. I AM WHO I AM. Did you know that God has a name? Read verses 13-17. God sent Moses to deliver the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. The Israelites had lived in a pagan culture for four hundred years, surrounded by those who believed in many gods. Many of the Israelites didn't have a clear understanding of God, so Moses asked God for His name. God said, "I AM WHO I AM; . . . Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (v. 14).

Verse 15. The Lord. The name *Lord* is the translation for *Yhwh*. This is God's name; a form of "I Am." Cryptic as it may sound, it actually reveals quite a bit about God. "*I Am*" means God is "the existing One," the only God who really exists. This indicates that God is self-existent, meaning God didn't come into existence through someone or something else; He has always existed. There is no "before God," and there will never be an "after God."

Read Acts 17:24-25. Notice what is said about God. He cannot be contained in buildings and He has no needs.

But there's more. *I Am* also means God is present and active. Furthermore, it means God is personal and intends for people to know Him. In Exodus 3:13-15, God revealed His name to Moses because God had come to save His people. Thus, *I Am* means God is the One who is present with His people and will act for their benefit. By revealing His name, God reveals that He will be present with His people continuously.

Read Acts 17:26-27 out loud.

Notice that God also gives to people so they will seek Him. Ultimately, He has given Himself to us in Jesus Christ in order to reconcile us to God so we might know Him. Thus, the God who created the heavens and the earth, the God who is boundless and self-sufficient, is also personal, close and wants us to know Him.

The fact that God has revealed Himself and named Himself means that God cannot be defined by "what I think" about God. God's identity and character are not up to what anyone thinks about God or wants Him to be like. For you or me to define God is idolatry (see Exodus 20:4-6). Only God can tell us who He is and what He is like. He has done this for us in Scripture.

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now report on who God is and what He is like.

Discussion Question

How does this understanding of God's name, *I Am*, help you understand who He is and why He has acted to save us?

Read Genesis 1:26-31 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Read the creation account in Genesis 1:1-25. Notice how similar each aspect of creation was described: "Then God said, 'Let there be. . .'" However, when God created man and woman, the description was much different—humanity is distinct from the rest of creation.

Verse 26. in Our Image, after Our likeness. God created man in His image. Ancient civilizations often thought the king was the "image of God" but never the carpenter, shepherd, or stone mason. However, God applied this term to all people. Each person is "royal" in God's eyes, possessing dignity and value as God's image bearer. This is what it means to be human.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now share answers to these questions: Were the commands in Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9 given before or after the fall of man in the garden of Eden? Therefore, did the sin of Adam and Eve cause mankind no longer to carry the image of God?

Verse 26. image . . . likeness. These Hebrew terms suggest reflection and representation. Reflection means we were created to be like God, reflecting God in our character and actions. Reflection also indicates that our first responsibility is our relationship with God. Bearing God's image means we are created to know God. **rule over.** We are to embody God's "lordship" over creation, yet we must exercise this rule with care as stewards, not as owners, for the well-being of all creation.

Verse 27. God created man in His own image . . . male and female He created them. Both male and female persons bear God's image. The creation narrative focuses on mankind's being distinguished by sexuality. Sexual identity—humanity as male and female—is not an accident of nature but rather a gift of God and His will for His image bearers. Every man and every woman equally bears God's image.

Verse 28. subdue. Disciples are to subdue the creation. *Subdue* means we work to advance God's program for this world, using the earth's resources for the benefit of humanity. God defines what is for humanity's benefit, not us. We exercise authority by doing what God desires for creation. Ruling means we exercise compassion and unselfish giving, never misusing, exploiting or polluting God's creation.

Assignment Three Feedback

The persons who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now report on what it means for people to be in God's image and what this indicates about humanity's relationship with God.

Discussion Questions

People often think of a human being as an animal, a mass of tissue, a cosmic accident or some other lower view of humanity. How does the biblical teaching of man as God's image correct these misunderstandings?

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights, and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Groups of disciples always are making preparations for evangelism, missions, and service. Use these minutes to work on the next plan.

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

The only way for us to understand who God truly is, is to see what God has revealed about Himself. By understanding God's name, we understand many important things about God's identity and character.

1. God is self-existent and beyond our full comprehension. Everything and everyone else is created by Him and dependent on Him for existence, including us.
2. God is close and intends for us to know Him. God has revealed Himself ultimately in Jesus Christ.
3. Because God is personal, our relationship with Him is one of warmth and understanding. Our relationship with God is not a one-way street. Through Scripture and prayer we communicate with God.
4. God must be approached as a Person, not an object of my making which I attempt to control.
5. While we, like the ancient Israelites, cannot save ourselves, God has stooped down to us to rescue us and reconcile us into a right relationship with Him. Our salvation is not our achievement. That salvation is based on God's grace and is accomplished by God's Son, not by human effort.

What do we learn about the meaning of being human?

1. We belong to God and were created to reflect and represent God. We were created to know God personally. Commitment, devotion, love, loyalty, and service to God are proper responses to those who bear God's image.
2. We experience full humanity only when we are properly related to God. No matter how sophisticated and cultured we may be, the only thing that defines true humanity is being properly related to God through Jesus Christ.
3. Every human is invaluable. The sacredness of life is extremely important to God. God's image in man is what provides the basis for human worth and dignity. This is true despite our sinfulness.
4. The image of God is universal in humankind. Both male and female, all races, all classes, all ages, and all persons equally bear God's image. Every person has been created to know God, to love God, and to glorify Him forever.

Follow up Question

In a culture that dehumanizes people, how does your focus on God as Creator help you grasp what it means to be truly human?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.