

**Reintegrate  
Your Vocation  
With  
God's Mission**

Bob Robinson

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Bob Robinson  
Founder and Executive Director

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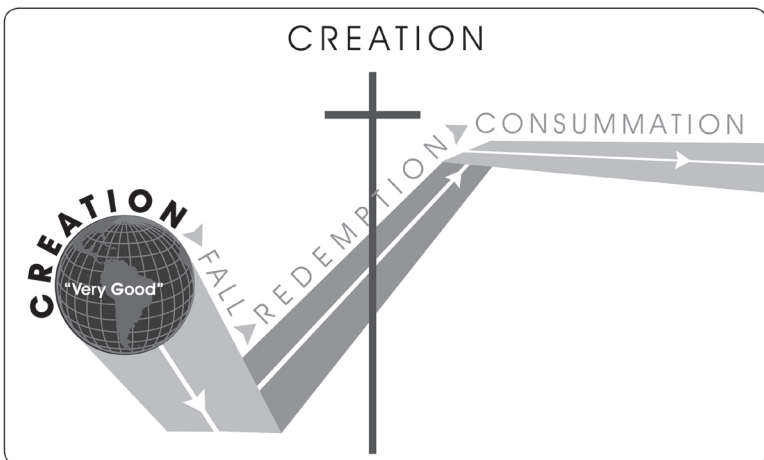
# Chapter 2

## Creation

### Learning Objectives

1. Participants will recognize how the events of Genesis enrich their faith story by highlighting how the goodness of Creation has affected their lives.
2. Participants will translate their work into the potential improvement of their culture.
3. Participants will compare the value they give people, including themselves, with the value God gives them.

### Framing the Conversation



## Reintegrate Your Vocation with God's Mission

Many, many people are trying to find the answer to the question, “Why am I here?” and Christians often ask, “Why did God make me?” The answer to these questions should be found in the first act of the four-act Good News Story. However, most people are not aware of this full story, so they seek the answer to these questions focusing only on one or two of the acts.

For instance, if a Christian focuses only on the second act (“The Fall,” where people are rebellious sinners) and the third act (“Redemption,” where Christ’s death and resurrection saves sinners), how would that Christian most likely answer the questions, “Why am I here?” and “Why did God make me?”

“The truncated Gospel that is often recounted is faithful to the fall and redemption pieces of the story, but largely ignores the creation and restoration components... Half-story versions begin abruptly in Genesis 3, where the separation of humanity from God is the opening scene...

Acknowledging there was goodness in the beginning doesn't eliminate corruption from the story; it just starts the story in a more foundational place.”

- Gabe Lyons, *The Next Christians*

How could this answer be more full, more complete, if we start with the first act of the four-act Good News Story and move our way through the entire story? Let's find out.

In Genesis chapter 1, we read of God creating the world in six days. We will not get into debates about how this meshes with science, because we want to focus on other important aspects of this passage of Scripture. Genesis 1 tells the story of God creating light, sky & seas, land, sun, moon & stars, flying creatures

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& swimming creatures and land creatures. In the latter half of the sixth day, God created humanity.

### **Bible Discovery**

In Genesis chapter 1, notice that throughout, God saw what he was creating and it was “good.”

#### **Read Genesis 1:31.**

What was God’s verdict on all that he had created?

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#### **Read Genesis 1:26-28.**

What does this passage say about what’s unique about the creation of humanity?

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## Reintegrate Your Vocation with God's Mission

In the Ancient Near Eastern cultural context within which Genesis was first read, the idea of the "image of a god" was familiar.

It was commonly believed that humanity was created as an afterthought to do the work the gods no longer wanted to do. The gods would bestow their image to kings who would rule people to serve the gods' desires. It was understood that the gods of that culture breathed their image into these elite kings, and therefore they ruled their provinces as the gods' representatives – as the stewards of that particular land, resources, and people.

This created very unjust societies where the powerful oppressed the marginalized as oppressive kings created and sustained economic, political and educational systems that favored only the elite.

In contrast, God reveals in Genesis that all of humanity (both male and female) possesses that which the ancients bestowed only to kings. God thus presents a counter-cultural story about the identity of humanity.

"This democratization of Mesopotamian royal ideology serves to elevate and dignify the human race with a noble status in the world."

– J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image*

Genesis reveals that all of humanity was created to be God's delegates on earth, to do what he would do: to lovingly rule and care for the creation (including not only what we might call "nature," but also all other aspects of God's creation – including societal and cultural institutions).

Since only God is "King," we should think of humanity as God's princes and princesses, ruling on his behalf as we reflect his character to the creation.

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Based on what you read on the previous page, how does the biblical understanding of the “image of God” differ from the rest of Ancient Near Eastern culture?

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If our dignity is derived from God because God created us as image-bearers, what is the best way to find our self-worth? How does this compare or contrast with how the world tells us to find self-worth?

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The human race is amazingly diverse, with all our cultures, our particular gifts and talents, and even all of our quirks and idiosyncrasies! How does diversity reflect the image of God?

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“We are Eikons (people made in the Image of God) which means it is our vocation to reflect the glory of God to the whole world by union with God and communion with others. In the words that many are using today, we embrace the world by being a missional community of faith.”

-Scot McKnight, *Embracing Grace: A Gospel for All of Us*

# Reintegrate Your Vocation with God's Mission

Look again at Genesis 1:28.

What did God intend for humanity to do?

“These five directives to govern and develop the original creation are what theologians call the “creation mandate” or “cultural mandate.” It is the first command God ever gave us, and he has never taken it back. If you are a human being, this cultural mandate applies to you. It is a large reason why God placed you on this planet.”

- Michael Wittmer,  
*Heaven is a Place on Earth*

- ◆ Be fruitful \_\_\_\_\_
- ◆ \_\_\_\_\_
- ◆ \_\_\_\_\_
- ◆ \_\_\_\_\_
- ◆ \_\_\_\_\_

In Genesis 1, the story of Creation is told from a cosmic view. In Genesis 2, the same story is told from a more earthly view. Here we actually meet Adam and Eve.

## Read Genesis 2:4-8.

According to verse 5, what were the two reasons why no shrubs or plants had yet grown?

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## Chapter 2 ♦ Creation

Notice that this is Genesis 2, before “The Fall” in Genesis 3, and that God intended for man to work the ground. Contrary to what some might think, work is not a product of The Fall! If God had always intended to create humanity as workers, what does that say about the goodness and dignity of work?

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Skip ahead and **read Genesis 2:15**

What are the two words or phrases in this verse that describe the purpose of the first human?

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The Hebrew in the original text of Genesis 2:15 for these two English words are *avad* and *shamar*.

*Shamar* (the second word found at the end of verse 15) means “to keep something safe, to protect, to care for.” Reflecting on the meaning of this word, what is humanity’s responsibility for the creation?

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# Reintegrate Your Vocation with God's Mission

The other word in Genesis 2:15 is *avad*, which appears many times in the Hebrew Old Testament, and can be variously translated, depending on the context.

## Watch how this word is used:

◆ In The Ten Commandments, the word is used for our work week:

“Six days you shall labor (*avad*) and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God” (Exodus 20:9-10).

So, Sabbath rest comes after 6 days of **labor** or work.

◆ In Exodus 8:1, God tells Moses:

“Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘This is what the LORD says: Let my people go, so that they may worship (*avad*) me.’”

The Israelites’ days of working in slavery under Pharaoh were over; they would now **worship** only the LORD.

◆ Later, Joshua pronounced these words:

“But as for me and my household, we will serve (*avad*) the LORD” (Joshua 24:14-15)

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In this passage, Joshua exhorted God's people to abandon serving other gods, and **serve** the LORD alone.

How, do you suppose, can this one (1!) word (*avad*) have all these various meanings?

עָבַד  
a v a d

“Earthly creation preceding the events recorded in Genesis 3 is like a healthy newborn child. In every respect it can be pronounced ‘very good,’ but this does not mean that change is not required. There is something seriously wrong if the baby remains in its infancy: it is meant to grow, develop, mature into adulthood. ”

- Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained*

If one word encompasses worship / work / service, then what God must have in mind for his people is for us to live lives that are totally integrated. All of our life is meant to be “*avad!*” However, somewhere along the line, our lives have lost this integrity (it happened in The Fall, which we will cover in the next lesson). Instead of being integrated, we have become (dis)integrated – literally! Praise God, though, for the gospel brings the good news that now God is enabling us to Reintegrate!

## Chapter 2 ♦ Creation

Read Genesis 4:20-22 where the Bible gives credit to the initial developers of technology and art.

What are some good ways that humanity is continuing to develop God's creation with our vocations today?

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Read the sidebar to the right. Have you ever thought of your vocation as unfolding the built-in potential and possibilities that are built into the creation?

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How does this change both your attitude toward work and the way you actually do your work?

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All of these (cultural initiatives found in Genesis 4:20-22) unfold the built-in potential of God's creation... To image God, then, human beings are charged not only to care for earth and animals ('subduing' "what's already there) but also with developing certain cultural possibilities ('filling' out what is only potentially there). To unfold such possibilities – for example, to speak languages, build tools and dies, enter contracts, organize dance troupes – is to act in character for human beings designed by God. That is, to act in this way is to exhibit some of God's own creativity and dominion in a characteristically human way."

- Cornelius Plantinga Jr.,  
*Engaging God's World*

# Reintegrate Your Vocation with God's Mission

Mike Wittmer, in his book, *Heaven is a Place on Earth: Why Everything You Do Matters to God*, asks some very important and practical questions. Take a moment to contemplatively and prayerfully consider the answers to these questions:

“Where does your job fit into this picture? How does what you do enable you and others to exercise dominion over the earth, cultivating its resources for the profit of humanity and the earth itself?”

“If you can locate your occupation within the process (of the Cultural Mandate), you will discover divine nobility in your tasks. You will no longer work with one eye on the clock, motivated only by your paycheck, but will realize that in your job you are cooperating with God. God has humbly chosen to complete and care for his creation through you”.

- Michael Wittmer,  
*Heaven is Place on Earth*

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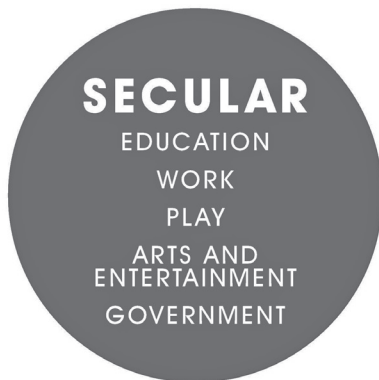
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## Chapter 2 ♦ Creation

What we have been talking about in this lesson is the need to reintegrate our lives. Many of us have been taught to believe that life is split into that which is “sacred” and that which is “secular.”



### **Sacred-Secular False Dualism**

But God never intended us to dis-integrate these things. He created everything to be sacred, done as “*avad*” for his glory.

## Reintegrate Your Vocation with God’s Mission

Take some time and quietly look at this diagram. Write down any ideas that come to mind as you reflect on this question:

How would my life look different if I saw *all* of life as sacred?

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### Group Interactive Discussion

1. Leader: Ask volunteers to share with the group what they found in the study that was...

◆ The Most Interesting

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◆ In Need of Clarification

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◆ An “Ah Hah” Moment

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2. As a group, discuss:

How should knowing that every person is created in the image of God change our view of the people we meet?

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3. Discuss each of the items listed in the “Secular” Circle on page 23.

What needs to be done to move these items over into the “sacred” Circle?

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**For next meeting: Read and answer all the questions in Chapter 3, “Fall.”**