

# God Created . . .



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Genesis 1–3, Acts 17:28, Psalm 148, Ps. 24:1, Gen. 4:1–9, Matt. 22:37–39, Rev. 14:7.*

**Memory Text:** “He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, but he who honors Him has mercy on the needy” (*Proverbs 14:31, NKJV*).

**H**ave you ever worked to create something—perhaps an item of art or craft, a meal, or some other creative work—only to have it broken or rejected by the person you gave it to? If so, you might have just a small glimpse of what God experienced when He made this world and gave human beings life, only then to see what He created broken by sin.

The Bible says that the world was created carefully and created “very good.” How God felt about His creation is evident in the accounts of Creation in Genesis 1 and 2. This is the context in which we should read the story of the Fall in Genesis 3 and the heartbrokenness of God as He confronts the people He has made.

Remarkably, our world continues to be something that God loves, even despite millennia of sin, violence, injustice, and outright rebellion. And even more remarkably, while God set in motion His plan for redeeming and re-creating the world, He has given us, as believers, roles to play in the fulfillment of His larger plans. Yes, we are the recipients of His grace; but, from the grace we have received, we have been given our work to do as collaborators with our Lord. What a solemn, sacred responsibility!

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 6.

## God: A Glimpse of Creation

This world and all life on it, our own life and all we do with it, the lives of everyone around us and how we interact with others, life itself and how it is best lived—all these begin with God, “for in Him we live and move and have our being’ ” (*Acts 17:28, NKJV*).

Here’s where the Bible’s story begins: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (*Gen. 1:1, NKJV*). And the fact that *He spoke it* into existence points to a power and a process that we can’t even begin to imagine.

And yet, God didn’t create from a distance; He was intimately involved, especially when it came to creating the first human being (*see Gen. 2:7*).

**Read** the story of the creation of the first human beings in Genesis 1:26–31. What important things does this account tell us about God? What important things does it tell us about people?

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It has often been said that we can learn a lot about God from spending time in nature, from looking at His creation, and seeing in it glimpses of the character of the Creator Himself. But we also can see glimpses of how God created the world to be from examining our understanding of God Himself. For example, if God is a God of order, we should expect to find order in His creation. Or if we believe that God is a God of creativity, we should not be surprised to find incredible examples of that creativity in the world He made.

Similarly, we believe that God is a God of relationships, and so, we find relationships as a core element in how God put the world together. He created each element of the world in relation to the rest of creation. He created animals in relational harmony. He created human beings in relationship with Himself, with each other, and with the rest of creation.

While our understanding of God is limited in many ways, what we can see of His character should prompt us to reconsider how the world should be.

**How helpful is it to your understanding of the world to see it as a reflection of the character of God, even with the ravages of sin so readily apparent?**

## A Complete World

It is easy to feel homesick for Eden. There is something in the brief descriptions of the Garden that God created as the home for Adam and Eve that sparks a note of longing in our hearts. We may not understand how such a world would work, but we feel we would like to experience it.

It seems the sense of satisfaction and completeness also was something that God felt: “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (*Gen. 1:31, NIV*). God made something that was both beautiful and functional. It was exquisite in its design, in both form and practicality. It was vibrant with life and color—but also filled with everything necessary for life to flourish. No wonder God kept pausing to muse that this world that He was making was good.

**Read** Genesis 1. What do you think is meant by the repeated statements that “God saw that it was good”? See *Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 25, and 31*.

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Even though written entirely after the Fall, the Bible is filled with celebrations of the natural world, such as in Job 38 to 41 and Psalm 148. And we must remember that these are not written as a glimpse looking back to how the world was when first created and before sin; they are written in the present tense, celebrating the goodness that is still evident in our world.

Jesus, too, drew examples of God’s goodness and care from the natural world (*see, for example, Matt. 6:26, 28–30*), commending both our reliance on God and an appreciation of the simple gifts that surround us with wonder. If we open our eyes and look at the marvels of creation, we can see that we are truly the recipients of marvelous gifts from our Creator. Our response, even amid trials, should be one of gratitude, thankfulness, and humble surrender to the Gift-Giver.

As Seventh-day Adventists—those who both celebrate Creation and anticipate God’s coming kingdom—we should realize that the beauties, joys, and goodness we see and experience in the world are glimpses of what our world once was and what it will again be.

**In your experience of the natural world, what do you especially appreciate about the wonders of Creation? In your daily life, how might you be able to know the Lord better through the wonders of the natural world?**

## Stewards of the Earth

According to the Bible’s record, the Garden of Eden and the newly created earth were places of abundance, created for life to flourish and particularly for human beings to enjoy.

But God also gave the first man and woman—and the rest of us who would come after them—a role to play in His creation. It quickly became obvious—and not just from His method of creation—that Adam and Eve were to have a special status in this new world.

Adam was first given the job of naming the animals and birds (*see Gen. 2:19*). Then he was given another role, presented as a blessing from God Himself: “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground’ ” (*Gen. 1:28, NIV*).

**Read** and compare Genesis 1:28 and Genesis 2:15. How would you characterize the human job description in a sentence or two?

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Too often in Christian history, Genesis 1:28 has been used by some as a license to exploit, even to the point of destroying the natural world. Yes, the world obviously was created for human life, benefit, and enjoyment. But the human responsibility is to “work it and take care of it”—in the words of Genesis 2:15 (*NIV*).

When we talk about stewardship, our first thought is often about money, but the first command for stewardship in the Bible is to care for the earth that God has created and entrusted to us. The command to Adam and Eve also foresaw that the earth would be shared with their children and with future generations. In the original plan for the world, the created world would continue to be a source of life, goodness, and beauty for all human beings, and Adam and Eve would have a big role in taking care of it.

The earth is still the Lord’s (*see Ps. 24:1*), and we are still called to be stewards of all that God has given us. Perhaps we could conclude, as well, that in a fallen world our responsibility as stewards is even greater.

**What does it mean to you to be a steward of the earth today, in a fallen world? How should the realization of this responsibility affect how you live on a day-to-day basis?**

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## A Broken World

One thing God gave Adam and Eve that He didn't give anything else on earth was *moral* freedom. They were moral beings in ways that plants, animals, and trees could never be. God valued this moral freedom so much that He allowed the possibility that His people would choose to disobey. In doing so, He risked all that He had created for the larger goal of a relationship with His human creatures based on love and free will.

But there was also a destroyer (this moral freedom existed for angels, as well), one who wanted to disrupt the good and complete world God created and sought to use God's special creation on earth—human beings—to do that. Speaking through the serpent, the devil questioned the completeness and sufficiency of what God had provided (*see Gen. 3:1–5*). The primary temptation was to covet more than God had given them, to doubt the goodness of God, and to rely on themselves.

In that choice and that act, the relationships that were integral to the creation as God had designed it were broken. No longer did Adam and Eve enjoy the relationship with their Creator that they had been designed for (*see Gen. 3:8–10*). These two human beings suddenly realized they were naked and ashamed, and their relationship with each other was almost irreparably altered. Their relationship with the rest of the earth also was strained and broken.

**Read** Genesis 3:16–19. What do these verses tell us about the changed relationships between human beings and the natural world?

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Because of the reality of sin, life suddenly got a lot harder for Adam, Eve, and the rest of creation. The consequences of sin are real, particularly as they affect humanity and our relationships. In a sense, we are distant from God our Creator. Our families also are affected in many ways, and our relationships with others are often a challenge. We even struggle in relation to the natural environment and the world in which we live. All aspects of our lives and our world show the brokenness caused by sin.

But this is not how God created the world to be. The “curses” of Genesis 3 also come with a promise that God would make a way to re-create our world and to repair the relationships that had been broken by sin. While we continue to struggle with sin and its effects in our lives, we are called to uphold the original goodness of the world and to seek to live out in our lives the plan God has for this world.

## The Family Web of Humanity

With the arrival of sin, it did not take long for the world to break down further. Sparked by jealousy, misunderstanding, and anger, the first murder involved the first pair of brothers. When God questioned Cain about his sin, his reply was ironic and rhetorical—“ ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’ ” (*Gen. 4:9*)—and the answer implied by God’s initial question was, “Yes, absolutely, you are your brother’s keeper.”

**Read Proverbs 22:2. What is implied in this apparently simple statement? What does it tell us about our relationship to our fellow human beings?**

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Everyone we meet is one of God’s creatures, created in His image, and part of the network of relationships that connects us all in God’s creation, fractured and broken though it might be. “We are all woven together in the web of humanity. The evil that befalls any part of the great human brotherhood brings peril to all.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 345. Like it or not, because of this common link, we have a God-given responsibility to God and to each other (*see Matt. 22:37–39*).

Throughout the Bible, the claim that God is our Creator is recurring. For example, it is one of the reasons given for remembering the Sabbath (*see Exod. 20:11*) and for worshiping God in the end time (*see Rev. 14:7*). It also is a primary motivation given for caring about others, for being concerned for the less fortunate.

We are all linked by the bond of our common origins in God. Whoever “oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God” (*Prov. 14:31, NIV*). How much clearer could that link be?

God as our Creator has a claim on us that demands our entire life, including our worship and our service and care for others. As difficult and frustrating and inconvenient as it might be at times, we are, indeed, our “brother’s keeper.”

**Why do you think God’s claims as Creator are such a recurring theme throughout the Bible? Why is this so important, and how should this reality affect how we treat others?**

**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Creation,” pp. 44–51, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“ ‘God is love.’ . . . His nature, His law, is love. It ever has been; it ever will be. ‘The high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity,’ whose ‘ways are everlasting,’ changeth not. With Him ‘is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.’ . . .

“Every manifestation of creative power is an expression of infinite love. The sovereignty of God involves fullness of blessing to all created beings.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 33.

“If men would do their duty as faithful stewards of their Lord’s goods, there would be no cry for bread, none suffering in destitution, none naked and in want. It is the unfaithfulness of men that brings about the state of suffering in which humanity is plunged. . . . God has made men His stewards, and He is not to be charged with the sufferings, the misery, the nakedness, and the want of humanity. The Lord has made ample provision for all.”—Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry*, p. 16.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Look carefully at the last Ellen White statement above. What is she saying? Who is she saying is ultimately responsible for so much of the poverty we see? What should this tell us about the importance of faithful stewardship?
- 2 After thousands of years of the brokenness caused by sin, how possible is it for us still to see the goodness of creation? As people who believe in the Creator God, what can we do to help others see the goodness of His creation?
- 3 What do you understand by the word *stewardship*? Has anything in this week’s lesson expanded your thinking about what it means to be a steward, particularly as we are called by God?
- 4 How might it change the way we relate to and treat others if we were to see a sign on every person we met that reminded us that this person is “created by God in His image and loved by Him”?

**Summary:** God created a good and complete world, and He appointed human beings, created in His image, to “tend and care for” His creation. Though sin broke the relationships that God originally had intended for us, we still have a role to play as stewards of the goodness of creation and caretakers of our fellow human beings. Fulfilling this role is one way we can honor God as our Creator.

## Girl Prayed for Angels

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, ADVENTIST MISSION

Food ran out on Sunday morning in nine-year-old Joanne's home. Father abandoned the family after Mother started attending the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the U.S. state of Oregon. Father, who had immigrated with the family to the United States from South Korea, made it clear he would never help them. "If you choose God, let your God feed you," he said. "Let your God clothe you."

Mother, who didn't have a job, prayed and cried in her bedroom that Sunday. When lunchtime came, Joanne's younger sister complained forlornly, "I'm hungry." Her older brother sat stone-faced, trying to be brave even though he was helpless. Then Joanne remembered reading in Uncle Arthur's Bedtime Stories about children who prayed and received help from angels.

"All we have to do is pray!" she exclaimed. "Uncle Arthur's Bedtime Stories say that if we pray, the angels will bring us food. Let's pray!"

Brother rolled his eyes. Little Sister complained again about her hunger. Joanne didn't know how to pray. "Hello, God," Joanne said. "We are really hungry. Uncle Arthur's Bedtime Stories say that You can send us food, so would You send us something to eat, please?"

The children waited. No food. Hours passed, and dinnertime came. Joanne thought, *What's wrong? God is late!* The children grew hungrier. Mother continued praying and crying in the bedroom.

Then Joanne said, "Oh, I know what we did wrong! God doesn't think that we believe Him because we didn't set the table."

She told her little sister to fetch metal chopsticks from the kitchen. The children set the table and sat down. "Sorry about that, God," Joanne prayed. "We probably did it wrong. Could You send us some food now? We're ready!"

But nothing came. The children climbed into bed disappointed and hungry that night. Early in the morning, they woke up to go to school. They had no food for breakfast and no money to buy lunch. "Don't bother Mother," Joanne whispered.

The children opened the front door to leave the house, but their path was blocked—by a huge box filled with food. Excitedly, the children called their mother to the door. She couldn't believe her eyes. Joanne was overjoyed. "The angels were just a little late!" she said.

At that moment, Joanne knew that God lives and that He hears and answers prayers. Joanne Kim (née Park) is now the mother of four children. She and her husband, Jon, a dentist, are missionaries in Mongolia.



*After the food miracle, Joanne, pictured left, is convinced that angels are Korean. "I will tell you today that angels are Korean," she said. "The food that they delivered was all Korean—everything you need to make rice, kimchi, and seaweed soup."*



## ***Part I: Overview***

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Wonder and awe are essential to a full life. As we read the Creation account in Genesis, chapters 1 and 2, we get caught up in watching God speak the cosmos into existence. We then see Him focused on forming humankind with His own hands and making man and woman in His image. We stand in wonder and awe at the mystery of Creation. Like the psalmist we declare: “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (*Ps. 8:3, 4*).

In this lesson, we marvel at the character of the Creator and appreciate His finished creation. Conversely, we weep at the results of our broken relationship with God and nature. This lesson challenges us to be stewards of God’s handiwork as He calls us to an existence of love, compassion, and stewardship in this broken world.

### **Teacher’s Aim:**

As you teach the lesson this week, explore how our focus on the wonder of God’s creation and our calling to care for His earth, and all that is therein, affects our attitudes and actions.

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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**Illustration:** The following story has been attributed to Sir Isaac Newton. Newton had an atheist friend. Because the friend did not believe in God, he preferred the position that the universe just happened. One day when Newton’s friend was visiting him, Newton showed him a model of the solar system. The sun, planets, and moons were all in their proper place. The sizes of the planetary and lunar spheres were in proportion and revolved around the sun at their relative speeds. The atheist was impressed with the model. “It’s intriguing,” he said, “who made it?”

“Nobody,” said Newton, “It just happened.”

**Scripture:** Albert Einstein has often been thought to have mused that he “who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed.” The glories of creation clearly indicate an Intelligent Maker: “And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good” (*Gen. 1:31*).

Humankind is part of God’s perfect creation (*Gen. 1:31*). God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (*Gen. 1:26*).

**Discuss in Class:** What does it mean to be made in God’s image?

“When Adam came from the Creator’s hand, he bore, in his *physical, mental, and spiritual nature, a likeness* to his Maker.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 15 (emphasis added).

God’s image in humanity also is reflected in Genesis 1:28: “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.” God can create; He has given some of this ability to humankind.

**Discuss in Class:** How is God using you and your church to restore “the image of God” wholistically in broken people in the community around your church?

**Discuss in Class:** Really, how good is God’s “very good”? Give some examples.

Here is an example of how good “very good” is: “If Adam, at his creation, had not been endowed with *twenty times* as much vital force as men now have, the race, with their present habits of living in violation of natural law, would have become extinct.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, pp. 138, 139 (emphasis added).

We do not really know exactly what Ellen G. White meant when she referred to “vital force.” Some scientists have suggested that part of the answer could be found in the energy-producing organelle “powerhouses” in the cell structure of living creatures. These powerhouses are called the mitochondria. The more mitochondria in your body, the more energy you will have.

Research has shown that endurance athletes have more than two times (200 percent) as many of these mitochondria “powerhouses” as non-athletes. When energy was measured in these athletes, it was found that they had around 25 percent more energy.<sup>1</sup>

Adam had 20 times (2,000 percent) the vital force that people now have. If an increase in mitochondria is related to an increase in “vital force,” that could mean that Adam had 20 times (2,000 percent) more mitochondria than the average person today. Can you imagine what it would be like to be in Adam’s presence? You could likely *feel* the energy exuding from him!

Adam and Eve were not only endowed with great vital force, but we also learn that “as Adam came forth from the hand of his Creator, he was of noble height, and of beautiful symmetry. He was more than *twice as tall* as men now living upon the earth, and was well proportioned.”—Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, p. 34 (emphasis supplied).

When God says His creation is “very good,” it is *very* good!

**Discuss in Class:** What would it be like to be in Adam’s presence—someone with 20 times more vital force than we have now? What would it be like to walk with him?

<sup>1</sup> University of Southern Denmark Faculty of Health Sciences, “New Research on the Muscles of Elite Athletes: When Quality Is Better Than Quantity,” *ScienceDaily*, November 2, 2016, <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/11/161102132208.htm>.

**Discuss in Class:** Contrast the “very good” handiwork of God and humankind, made in His image, with an evolutionary perspective in which humankind is a product of time + matter + chance.

**Discuss in Class:** How does the evolutionary perspective affect the way in which we view people?

In our broken condition, we need “vision correction.” Such spiritual “eyeglasses” will enable us to see all people as human beings made in the image of God (*Gen. 1:26, 27*), even though we all are broken and some people may not look or act as you would wish. It is important to see people through eyes of love and respect—not necessarily as they are now but as they can be when God works in their lives to restore them.

“The Lord is disappointed when His people place a low estimate upon themselves. He desires His chosen heritage to value themselves according to the price He has placed upon them. God wanted them, else He would not have sent His Son on such an expensive errand to redeem them.” —Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 668.

**Discuss in Class:** Why are all people valuable? What is the difference between pride and self-worth in light of Creation and Redemption? How does the high value of every person affect your church’s ministry?

**Scripture:** “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion [let them rule] . . . over all the earth” (*Gen. 1:26*). “And God blessed them, and God said unto them . . . have dominion over . . . every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (*Gen. 1:28*). “And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress [till] it and to keep [watch over] it” (*Gen. 2:15*).

Dominion or rulership over God’s creatures and the earth is part of being made in God’s image. God owns (*Ps. 24:1*) and rules the earth, and we are His managers—the stewards of His earth and of its creatures. Amazingly, the Ruler made humans corulers along with Him!

Each human is not only linked to each human; all creation is linked. God Himself is linked to His creatures. (*See Acts 17:24–26.*) Consider the similarities in Scripture between humans and animals, tying them closely together. Both humans and animals (texts refer to all living creatures unless otherwise noted):

- Are created by God from the earth [land creatures (*Gen. 1:24, 25*; *Gen. 2:19*); humans (*Gen. 2:7*); birds (*Gen. 2:19*)]<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> While there is no Bible text that says that sea creatures were created from the earth, sea creatures and birds were created on the same day: “And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good.” (*Gen. 1:21*). Either the sea creatures were created ex nihilo or from the earth. Because sea creatures and birds, like all living creatures, return to the earth when they die, we can assume they were created from the earth, though ex nihilo creation is possible.

- Have within them the breath of life (*Gen. 2:7, Gen. 7:15*).
- Receive God’s blessing [aquatic creatures and winged birds; humans (*Gen. 1:21, 22, 28*) and divine affirmation [all living creatures (*Gen. 1:31*)].
- Are originally given a vegetarian diet [humans (*Gen. 1:29*); animals on the earth; winged birds (*Gen. 1:30*)].
- Are capable of killing [humans (*Gen. 4:8*); wild animals (*Gen. 37:33; 2 Kings 2:23, 24; Dan. 6:24*); domestic animals (*Exod. 21:28–32*)] reptiles (*Num. 21:6*).
- Are included in God’s covenant (*Gen. 9:12*).
- Are beneficiaries of Sabbath rest [humans; domestic animals (*Exod. 20:10*)].
- Are set apart for the Lord, if firstborn male [humans; domestic animals (*Exod. 13:12, Num. 3:13*)].
- Are told to be fruitful and multiply [aquatic creatures; winged birds (*Gen. 1:22*); humans (*Gen. 1:28*)].<sup>3</sup>

How is your theology linked to your ecology?<sup>4</sup> What is included in our stewardship of “all the earth”? How does your caring for the environment, *all* creation, and also being your “brother’s keeper” (*Gen. 4:9*) impact your lifestyle and ministry? Have class members share what they already are doing about these important truths.

### ***Part III: Life Application***

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Remember that the purpose of a Sabbath School class is not merely to sit around and have a nice discussion about fascinating historical and theological issues. In this lesson, we have noted that sin broke the relationships that God originally had intended for us. But we still have a role to play as stewards of the goodness of creation and as caretakers of our fellow human beings. With that in mind:

- 1. Observe and appreciate what is left of the “very good” in nature. This week, take a walk out in nature. Look around you and notice all the “good” that you see. Bring home a beautiful stone or shell, feather or leaf. Keep it as a reminder that we need to appreciate God’s creation more.**

<sup>3</sup> Jo Ann M. Davidson, “Who Cares?” *Adventist Review*, June 25, 2009, pp. 51–54.

<sup>4</sup> Jo Ann M. Davidson, “And It Was Good,” *Adventist Review*, August 21, 2008, p. 11.

2. The next time you or your church gets involved in serving the poor, ask yourself, “Is what we are doing causing them to become slaves to our generosity?” In other words, are you offering services that help move the poor from relief to individual development, helping them envision a better future, while nurturing within them a spirit of stewardship? Discuss your answer in light of this reflection: if we limit our outreach to giving out day-old bread and other food every Wednesday, and the same people come back, month after month, year after year, for 10 years, we as a church are failing to help the poor to move toward wholistic dominion over their lives and surroundings. Consider parallel ministries that provide skills such as budgeting, literacy, language, job skills, and so forth that will provide a horizon of possibilities for a better life.

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