

LIFE

Genesis 1:1-2:9

Here is the starting point for everything. Here is GENESIS. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”

- Where did everything come from? God.
- How did it all come into being? God spoke.
- How long did it take? ... well... The Bible gives us the answers we NEED not necessarily all the answers we WANT.

But here is what we KNOW - “In the beginning, God.” ***This universe was not a cosmic accident.*** Humans are not the product of random mutations. God SPOKE and life began. God spoke and creation progressed. This is the essential starting point for a Christian worldview. Genesis 1:1 is the cornerstone for Christian belief. Everything begins with God and God started with a WORD: **“LET THERE BE... LIGHT.”**

Let’s stop right here and reflect. ***How did YOU come into being?*** It was not a chance encounter between a couple of microscopic cells. God said, “Let there be... Terri.” “Let there be... Dave” (that covers a lot of you). “Let there be... Kristin.” “Let there be... Joe.” **God spoke you into being** just as He spoke this universe into existence. You are not an accident. You are a particular creation of the Almighty God.

- God knew your name before the creation of the world.
- God called you into being.
- God breathed into you the breath of life.
- God designed you to reflect His glory in this world.
- And God assigned specific work for YOU - and only you - to do.

Here are **three CONVICTIONS** from the creation account: three foundational truths from Scripture.

Three Convictions from Creation

1. Your Life is Not Yours
2. Your Life has Value
3. Your Life has Purpose

Let’s walk through these three convictions and then see how they are ultimately fulfilled in Christ.

First, your life is Not Yours.

If you read your email this week or visit our website you will quickly see that ***I am drawing heavily on the work of Pastor Colin Smith.*** This whole OPEN series is being done in cooperation

with Pastor Colin and his church in Chicago. So if you read the extra material at www.openthebible.org or attend the Unlocking the Bible Story classes on Sunday mornings you will quickly realize I have been greatly influenced by Colin. And my hope is that by the end of this year, you will be too. Colin belongs on our list of godly leaders and gifted preachers like Tim Keller, John Piper and J.D. Greear and older ones like Charles Spurgeon and Jonathan Edwards.

With that caveat: Your Life is Not Yours. "In the beginning, God created."

1. Your Life is Not Yours

*"In the beginning, **God created**... The earth was without form and void... And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." Genesis 1:1-3*

God is the creator. He made all that is, including you and me. And the creator has the right of OWNERSHIP. We have a lot of **Legos** in our house. If you build a lego set, then it is yours to play with and yours to take apart. If one of your brothers wants to use it, he may - but not with the same rights as the OWNER. He can't just pop a wing off and place it on his own star cruiser, without first asking you - the maker.

The principle applies to this whole world. God created everything, therefore EVERYTHING belongs to God. It is HIS. You are HIS. I am HIS. This church is HIS. This city is HIS. The cosmos belong to God for He created them.

Therefore we cannot just do whatever we want with this world. It is not OURS to break pieces off of and use for our own projects. You can't just do whatever you want with **other people**. They are not YOURS to use and discard as you see fit. Even our children are not really ours. We have them for a painfully short period of time and then, if no one else will, they will happily remind us that they do not belong to us.

Even your life is not yours. You do not have sovereignty over yourself. You are a CREATED BEING and GOD has the full rights of OWNERSHIP over you.

- Your life is NOT YOURS.
- Your body, soul and mind have been entrusted to you by the loving, All-Sovereign Creator.
- And you will answer to Him. Your minutes and days are not YOURS - they are HIS - and you will answer to Him for how you use them.
- Your talents and resources are not YOURS - they are HIS - and you will answer to God for how you STEWARD them.
- **Money** is one of the most obvious applications here. Your money is not YOURS. My money is not MINE. Everything you have was given to you - entrusted to you - to manage.

We are STEWARDS, not OWNERS. God is the owner and we manage HIS STUFF.

1. Your Life is Not Yours

*"In the beginning, **God created...**" Genesis 1:1*

- Created by God's Word, you are **Responsible** to your Owner

As those who have been created by the Word of God's creative power we are responsible to Him as The Owner. This should be humbling for us but also **tremendously freeing**.

- God is the owner. It's all His. You don't need to struggle and agonize over why He made you a certain way - just trust Him as your Creator.
- He SPOKE you into being. He fashioned you personally, intentionally in your mother's womb.
- You don't need to agonize over what happens in the world or in your life. It's not for us to micromanage God - but to TRUST Him; to rest in His plan for us.
- He is the owner. He is the Designer. He is the Ruler. We are the managers; we are the created things; we are the servants.

The One who said "let there be light" also said, "**Let there be YOU**" and there was you. Your life is not yours. It belongs to the Lord who made it. Trust His plans for you. They are VERY GOOD.

This means that **life is not meaningless**. If everything happened by random chance then there is no meaning or purpose in life and nothing matters in the end - you can do whatever you want. But if God created everything then there is a meaning to creation - a great purpose toward which everything is moving. And if God created YOU then there is meaning for your life, hope and a future!

That leads us to the second conviction - your life has VALUE.

2. Your Life has Value

*"Then God said, '**Let us make man in our image and after our likeness... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.**'" Genesis 1:26-27*

Genesis one is one of the most beautiful, artistic, poetic, symmetrical written pieces in history. It is also one of the most analyzed and debated. The basic structure is obvious - **six days God works creating everything and on the seventh day He rests**. Moses wrote this book as the introduction to God's Law, the Torah, so it establishes the right of ownership as the basis for our devotion to God and obedience to Him. And it also provides the basis for the uniquely Jewish Laws about **the Sabbath**.

- Why should God's people rest on the seventh day? Because God rested on the seventh day and thereby made it HOLY.

God SEPARATED one day each week from the other six and declared it to be HOLY. A special day. Unique. Unlike the others.

- On the first day God separated **light from darkness**, calling the light day and the darkness night.
- On the second day God separated the **waters above** from the waters below.
- On the third day God separated **the land** from the sea.

But **the greatest separation came on the sixth day**. All of God's creative activity built to this crowning achievement, this pinnacle of His work. The first half of day six reads like all the others with the creation of the land animals, ending with the pronouncement in verse 25 "and God saw that it was good."

But ***then day six continues***, making it dramatically unlike the preceding days. Lots more words, lots more meaning. And the message is clear - God created mankind SEPARATE from everything else. Distinct. Unique.

- For the first time God does not just say "Let there be" but here says, "**LET US MAKE.**" This is a divine conference of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- The Triune God creates man it says "in OUR IMAGE, in OUR LIKENESS."
- God created mankind to rule - to exercise dominion - like God.
- At every other stage it says "God made" only once. But in verse 27 it says, "**God created three times.**"
- And the other days end with the observation that "it was good" but day six is described as **VERY GOOD.**

2. Your Life has Value

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image and after our likeness...'" Genesis 1:26

- Separated to Reflect God's Glory

Your life has value because **God separated you from everything else He made to reflect HIS GLORY**. Every human life has dignity and value because every person is created in the image of God. This value begins at the moment of conception - so even the unborn have value as they are made in the image of God. This value applies even when things go wrong - like genetic malformations, accidents or aging.

Consider the contrast in a secular worldview. If everything is a cosmic accident then you are not responsible to anyone. There is no meaning or purpose to life - we simply exist and then we cease to exist. No life has intrinsic value, only commercial value. **According to secularism, you are only worth what you can produce.**

- Therefore the unborn have no rights if they intrude on the desires of the mother.
- The disabled have less value than the healthy and we should use selective reproduction to eliminate the weak and sick.
- Healthy people are more valuable than sick ones - and the sick should be free to terminate their own lives if and when they choose.

- Beautiful people are more valuable than ugly people and deserve lots of advantages.
- Athletic people are more valuable than less athletic.
- Smarter people are more valuable than dumber people...
- Your value is determined by your appearance, your ability, your status – what you can PRODUCE.

But Genesis one refutes all of this. ***People matter - every person matters – not because of what they produce but because they are stamped with the image of God.*** Every child matters. God created and cares about every person everywhere.

- You have value not based on your appearance, ability or performance but because God created you. You are HIS. He separated you from the rest of creation to reflect His glory.
- **You are a unique mirror** – only YOU can reflect the glory of God in YOUR WAY. So you are not just valuable – you are infinitely valuable – PRICELESS!

Kristin and I had friends at college named **Matt and Shannon**. They had a baby girl around the time we had Joel - her name was Waverly. At first, she seemed like a normal child - growing, moving, talking. But by the age of three it became clear that Waverly had some delays and problems. Over time those problems started getting worse. She began to lose motor skills she had learned and eventually lost the ability to speak altogether.



Waverly was diagnosed with a genetic, ***degenerative, fatal disease called Sanfillipo Syndrome***. Soon after her little brother, Oliver, was also diagnosed. This precious little girl and boy settled into slow and simple routines that their parents, Matt and Shannon, learned to celebrate. They went to pools and parks and often to Disney World. They grieved and expressed their sadness and loss of hopes and dreams - but they also gave thanks for each moment with the special kids God designed

for them and how each of them uniquely reflected the image of their Creator.

On December 19 - just a couple of weeks ago - ***Oliver went home to heaven***. He joined his sister, Waverly, there, for she went home to the Lord three years ago. The main thing I've learned and continue to learn from Matt and Shannon is the value of LIFE - of human life. Waverly and Oliver were unique creations of God and were VALUABLE - precious - as reflections of God's image and glory.

In fact, those two children reflected God's glory in ways no one else could. Their simple joy and unconditional love; their innocence and vulnerability. I link to Shannon's blog from the church blog. Listen to her heart - learn from this couple and their journey of faith. See the glory of God in those two faces and their stories. They were shorter stories than most - but all the more beautiful for their brevity. Listen to how Matt describes Waverly and her glorious reflection of the Creator:



I remember Waverly, the joyful, who danced and twirled and ran, who at three years old wore a Dora the Explorer backpack constantly and a Snow White dress for special occasions... She loved birthday parties, no matter whose, and eating black beans and quesadillas at Chipotle, which she mistakenly called Chicago.

I remember Waverly, the music lover. Her love of music was so intense it led me to do embarrassing things like sing "I'm A Little Black Rain Cloud" in crowded public spaces... I remember a wild child, who would steal food off of other people's plates...

I remember Waverly, the big sister. made life easier for Oliver. We spent the first three and a half years of her life thinking she would grow up into an adult and should be progressing normally. We were frequently frustrated and concerned by her lack of progress, sometimes mistaking it for disobedience. Because of her, Oliver never experienced our unrealistic expectations, and benefitted from early intervention and our improved understanding of the medical issues he faced from the very first days of his life.

I remember Waverly, the considerate hostess, who regularly convened tea parties for her stuffed animals, giving each a seat at the table and pouring for her mommy and daddy and even the dog and anyone else who walked through our door.

I remember Waverly, the sensitive soul, who cried when her favorite shows ended or when she had to leave her friends. Waverly would regularly take the hand of total strangers, usually bringing a surprised smile to their faces. I used to joke that she would take the hand of an axe-murderer while he still had the axe in his other hand.

There are so many little things I remember about you, Wavey Mae: your pigtails; the little gap between your front teeth; your crooked smile; your infectious giggle and squeaky laugh; the birthmark on your wrist; how entertaining you were playing with your first best friend, Colin; how giddy you got about seeing your grandma or cousin, Mel Moo; the abject panic we felt the time we lost your Baa Baa in the middle of Ohio only to find that a good Samaritan had gone out of her way to save him; how you would say "uh-Oh'd" whenever clocks would chime; that smile on your face the day we met Elmo in the freezing cold after a catastrophic blowout left you wearing only a diaper and your mommy's sweatshirt;

Like Dumbo the elephant with big ears whose differences kept him from fitting in, MPS made you different, Wavey. But your loving heart and gentle spirit, MPS could not steal or hide, and I saw repeatedly how you softened the people around you and make them kinder and more compassionate. We were and are so very proud of you. Yes, the very thing that held you down, Waverly, has carried you up, in this world and into the next. You've been called home. But we're still here, and we miss you terribly. I am so grateful for your life. Thank you for leaving us with these wonderful memories, which are to me the greatest of poems.

Read the rest here: http://familyctravels.blogspot.com/2015/12/matts-eulogy_6.html

But bring some tissues. It is beautiful and inspiring, but also heart-wrenching. Here is the eulogy for Oliver: <http://familyctravels.blogspot.com/2018/12/olivers-eulogy.html>

Oliver was joy. For as long as he could, Oliver started his day running full speed from our bedrooms to the front of the house, letting out happy shrieks along the way, excited by the promise of a new day... He loved simple pleasures - holding a helium balloon as it bounced against the ceiling, petting an animal at the zoo, or throwing a ball whether you were ready for it or not.

Oliver had a voice. He only picked up a smattering of words: ball, bye-bye, and duck for his favorite stuffie... My favorite was how he put both hands on his head and said "Oh" whenever something fell or broke. For a brief period he developed an arsenal of signs. More. Finished. Please. His first sentence should not surprise anyone: "Want eat".

Happy shrieks, sad whimpers, gretzy groans, contented murmurs. To the uninitiated they must have sounded like so much noise, but they were the sweetest music to us and gave us a way to know and understand him, his needs and wants. For years, I have carried on my keychain a Lego Chewbacca figure because it reminded me of Oliver, whose sounds everyone could hear but only a privileged few of us Han Solos knew the meaning.

Oliver was a comfort. He loved giving and getting hugs, but he also liked when people around him hugged each other. When we was three, Oliver would come up to two people standing close to each other, put his hands on the back of their legs, and push them together. He did this to me whether I was standing next to Shannon or a perfect stranger.

Until the end of his life, Oliver loved hugs. In his later years he would position himself in front of you a certain way and lean in. If you wrapped your arms around him, he leaned in a little harder. I loved nothing more than getting him ready for bed, then getting down on my knees, pulling him close, and feeling my independent little boy rest his head next to mine.

After Waverly died in 2015, Oliver became our comfort. He gave us a continued sense of purpose and joy. Only with his passing did we realize just how much he had comforted us over these last three years.

Oliver was a brother. When Waverly first met Oliver in his hospital bassinet, she took one look and said, "Monkey!" In other words, they bonded instantly.

When Oliver started constantly putting things in his mouth, we gave him a red chewy tube as a safe alternative as that had worked for Waverly. He studied it for a second, then walked across the room to put it in Wavey's mouth instead of his. He knew the red chewies were for his sister. Because of his generosity, we needed a distinct alternative that he knew was his. Thus, his signature blue chewy tube came to be.

We were so nervous for him when he started school. We weren't sure how the other kids would treat him or if he would know how to interact with them. He had a rough start. He was most definitely a mama's boy and very attached. Then one day we noticed that his backpack was full of books and toys. His teacher confirmed that yes, Oliver was stealing from school. But she also told us that he was filling up the other kids' backpacks as well. Suddenly, the thieving didn't matter; he was giving gifts to his friends!

Oliver was so much more. He was Boppy. He was Chumbly, nicknames that fit him so well.

He was his mother's son, who had her look, her personality and temperament, and who followed her like a duckling. Oliver was hungry, always hungry. He loved to eat.

He was only a few days old when the nurses in the NICU were referring to him as an old soul. And in bearing his suffering so nobly, with persistent joy and without complaint, he stirred the souls of others.

It was natural for someone who loved Oliver to pray for a miracle; none of us wanted to let him go. But over time it became apparent to us that HE was the miracle and the healing we needed was for our own hearts.

While I still have a hard time understanding why all this happened, I know people responded to Oliver by better loving those around them and that the world became a kinder place because Oliver was in it. Hopefully you have a better sense of who he was and what we lost.

Oliver, you made us so proud to be your mom and dad. You were the greatest of gifts. We love you, we miss you so very much, and we can't wait to see you again.

Every human life is valuable. Every single one. Including yours. God separated you from everything and everything else in creation - he singled you out to reflect His glory in ways only YOU CAN. So never think you are worthless. Never believe the lie that your life doesn't matter. You matter. You are precious. Indeed, as you reflect God's image, you are GLORIOUS.

Do you feel the force of these convictions from God's Word? Your life is not yours. Your life has value. Third - Your life has PURPOSE.

3. Your Life has Purpose

*“And **God blessed them**. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and **have dominion...** over every living thing...” Genesis 1:28*

- Called to Rule God’s World

God blessed Adam and Eve for a purpose. He never blesses you with something unless there is a reason for it. Verse 29 shows all God gave them, “every plant, every tree, every beast, every bird.” God gave them a lush garden, overflowing with life. He gave them a world to explore filled with never-ending creating. And it was all VERY GOOD.

God has blessed YOU for a purpose. Your life has purpose. You were created on purpose. Your life has value to reflect the glory of God. **And your purpose is to RULE - to exercise DOMINION.** Brothers and sisters, we were created to REIGN.

And don’t forget Revelation 22:5 -

3. Your Life has Purpose

*“They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and **they will reign forever and ever.**” Revelation 22:5*

- Called to Rule God’s World

When God remakes the heavens and the earth “they will not need the light of lamp or sun for the Lord God will be their light, **and they will reign forever and ever.**” This was God’s original purpose for Adam and Eve and it will be our eternal reality. We will REIGN. We will exercise dominion over God’s great big world. We will steward all He has made.

Work is not a punishment - it is one of God’s greatest gifts. When you work, you bring order out of disorder. You exercise dominion - in God’s name - over your little slice of creation. Whether that is by writing lines of computer code or changing diapers, you are called to RULE over God’s World. Look at Genesis 1:2

3. Your Life has Purpose

“The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep.” Genesis 1:2

- Called to Rule God’s World

Through six days of WORK, God took a formless, empty, chaotic darkness and turned it into a light, organized, flourishing fullness! **We do not create things as God did but we can and do ORGANIZE them.** And we are called to do this God-like work – to exercise dominion over the world God made for us.

You may not feel that your work matters – **but all work (if it’s not immoral or illegal) does matter.**

- **Teaching** brings truth and wisdom where there is ignorance and foolishness.
- **Medical care** brings healing and hope where there is pain.
- **Business** efforts bring order and wealth where there is disorder and poverty.
- **Construction** creates environments where people can flourish – exactly as God did when He planted the Garden.
- **Parenting** is a very God-like work – walking with children in the cool of the day – calling them out of their hiding when they have sinned and giving them consequences to help them learn to trust God and obey Him.

Your work matters and is part of how you reflect God’s glory. You have both value as God’s creation and purpose as God’s ambassador here on earth.

Three Convictions from Creation

1. **Your Life is Not Yours – and is not meaningless**
2. **Your Life has Value – you are not worthless**
3. **Your Life has Purpose – you are not aimless**

- Life is not meaningless but is filled with richness, purpose and hope.
- Life is not worthless but is infinitely valuable as we reflect the image of God.
- Life is not aimless, for we are called to rule over God’s world.

Just as God named things like light and darkness, day and night – so he commissioned Adam to name the animals. ***And God named YOU so you could identify and organize the people and things in your life*** – so you could name your children and other people you influence.

Those are the three convictions from the creation account of Genesis 1. The chapter concludes with verse 31 – *“And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.”* What a beautiful closing line to a beautiful chapter. Then we turn to chapter 2 –

“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day.”

God FINISHED His work, then He rested. So we are called to a life pattern of work and rest; work and rest. We do not keep the Sabbath as a rigid law with a detailed breakdown of what you can and cannot do on the Sabbath – but we should observe the principle of a day off for rest every week, with a special focus on worshiping the Lord. Sometimes in our “gospel freedom” we overreact and lose sight of the reason for the principle behind the command.

Sabbath keeping was one of the top 10 commands God gave so His people would be blessed and distinctive.

- If you push too long without rest your body will begin to struggle.
- If you neglect worship and fellowship due to work or travel or sports or other things your soul will begin to struggle. You will feel dry and weak and sick spiritually.

God is the Giver of LIFE. If you want to experience life in the joyful abundance God planned for His people, that life can only be found in one place. Listen to Genesis 2:7

*“Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and **breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.**” Genesis 2:7*

Here is the act that separated Adam from everything else in creation. Everything else came into being by the verbal declaration of God. “Let there be... and it was.” But **Adam God formed from the dust, with His hands.** Adam God breathed into directly, personally and so he became a living creature.

That is how **God created the first human physically.** It is how He created you as well. In your mother’s womb God knit you together by His own hands.

And God is also the One who brought you to life SPIRITUALLY. Since we are born with a sinful nature and consistently choose to sin throughout our lives the Bible says all people are DEAD in their sins. “BUT GOD” can make you alive. He can breathe the breath of life into everyone who comes to Him in faith.

The prophet Ezekiel saw the house of Israel as **a valley filled with dry bones** – like the entire nation of Hebrews had been wiped out in a catastrophic war. God commanded the prophet to PROPHECY over the bones and through this WORD of the LORD the bones came to life:

*“So I prophesied as he commanded me, and **the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.**” Ezekiel 37:10*

The word for breath is the same word as SPIRIT so hear this promise from Ezekiel 37:14 –

*“**And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.**” Ezekiel 37:14*

- True Life comes from Jesus Christ Alone

JESUS is the Giver of Life. John 1 tells us that all things were created by HIM – the WORD OF GOD. He spoke the universe into being in the first place. And He is the One who can breathe the breath of life into your cold, dead heart. Apart from Jesus people are nothing but dry bones spiritually – cold, lifeless, motionless. But when they hear the Word of the Lord the Holy Spirit does a miracle and breathes the breath of life into them.

Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. He came that we might have life and have it abundantly. True life is found in Jesus Christ and Him alone. This is true both about heaven and eternity and it is true for this life as well. True, joyful, abundant life can only be found in Christ. There is no hope apart from Him.

We will pray in a moment but let me briefly summarize our sermon series this year. It's called OPEN – a one year journey through the Bible. What we'll see is that:

Open – A One Year Journey through the Bible

- The Bible is One Story
- And it all Points to Jesus

The story begins in a garden and ends in a city. It starts with two people and ends with a great crowd. In Genesis we see that God's creation was very good – life was flourishing, there was no sadness or death or pain or suffering. The garden was bounded by four life-giving rivers and at the center was the Tree of Life. Similarly, in the New Earth there will be a river flowing from the throne of God filled with the water of life. And the Tree of Life will have 12 trees growing on either side of the river, bearing fruit for the healing of the nations. All chaos will be replaced with order. All suffering and sadness and death will be removed so there is only LIFE and joy.

There will be no darkness or night anymore – for God's glorious presence will be visibly present with His people forever. And all of this will be centered around the Lamb of God who is seated on His Throne.

The Bible is One Story and it all points to Jesus. From Genesis to Revelation we will read of and experience the glory and grace of Jesus Christ. May we all draw closer to the Lord and each other as we travel this journey through Scripture this year!

Let's pray.