

Rebecca Manley Pippert

know

Your life with Christ

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Introduction

When I was a young agnostic searching for answers, I had a conversation with a well-meaning Christian. After some discussion she finally said in exasperation: “Becky, faith is an experience of the heart! Don't let your mind get in the way!” I responded: “But if there is a God and he created us with minds, then why doesn't he want us to use them? Shouldn't true faith offer real answers that help us make sense of life?”

As I continued my spiritual journey (one that eventually led to my becoming a Christian), I discovered that the God of the Bible does want us to know what is true—and that this truth is wonderful.

Christianity is a religion of revelation. God has revealed who he is, who we are, and the purpose and meaning of life, in his word, the Bible. So in KNOW, we will explore the central beliefs of the Christian faith and how they make sense of our world and our lives. We will start before the beginning of human history, and travel right through to beyond the end of history.

In all this, we will be discovering the key truths about God, the world, and ourselves. In other words, we will be studying doctrine—truth. Why does doctrine matter? Because most of life is ultimately a “God problem.” Think of the problems we face at various stages of our lives: How do we cope with suffering? How do we find a secure identity in a confusing and ever-changing world? What do we do when we fail, or those we trusted betray us? Where do we find hope that is lasting and true?

The answer lies in knowing the character of God, not in a fingers-crossed human act of wishful thinking. To know who God is enables us to live our lives with confidence, strength and joy. We are able to live our lives with purpose, grit and glory as we live knowing God. Knowing God's truth isn't dry or boring—it is thrilling. I'm so pleased you're joining me as we discover together more of our God, and more of ourselves.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Becky". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large, prominent 'B' at the start.

How To Use This Handbook

Everything you'll need (apart from a Bible and a pen) is in this handbook. Each session has several different elements:



Introduction. Helps you begin to think about the main theme of the session. You can read in the handbook, or watch Becky on the DVD or download.



Historical Context. Explains what is going on in the part of the Bible you're about to look at.



Bible Study. This will take most of your time, as you look at the Bible together and share what you discover as you answer the questions in this handbook. A good Bible translation to use is the "NIV2011." There is space in the handbook to make notes, but it's not compulsory!



Live What You Learn. The Bible changes us in how we think and act. This section encourages you to think about what difference the section of the Bible you've been reading might make to you.



Following Jesus. Listen to Becky talk about the main themes of the session. There is a summary of what she says in your handbook.



Praying Together. A time to speak to God. Prayers don't have to be long or use complicated words; and feel free to pray silently in your head if you don't feel comfortable praying out loud.



Going Deeper. Something for you to take home to read and think about between sessions. This is entirely optional. If you have any questions, do ask them at the start of the next session.

Note For Leaders: You'll find a concise Leader's Guide for the course, as well as the downloadable videos, at www.thegoodbook.com/know. You'll need the access code in your DVD case to be able to get onto the page.

I. The Beginning

Genesis 1 v 1 – 2 v 3

The very first words in the very first book of the Bible, called Genesis, say: “In the beginning God created...” Today there are many popular views about God. One view tells us to seek the “god within.” God is not outside of us, people who believe this say, but within our psyche; therefore we must trust our hearts to guide us. Another view says that God is one with everything, which is pantheism. According to this view, we ourselves are god because we carry the spark of the divine—but so do trees and rocks and cows.

Christianity says something altogether different, which we’ll be discovering throughout this series. But for now we must ask: *how do we find out who God truly is?* The Judeo-Christian faith is based, not primarily on what *we* think about God, but on what God has revealed about himself. Biblical faith is rooted not in our discovery but in his disclosure. Christianity is a religion of revelation. God has revealed himself in many ways, but his primary revelation is through his Son, Jesus, and the Bible.

Genesis is a book of beginnings that gives an account of who God is and who we are. Our first study in Genesis chapter one is the fascinating account of how God formed the universe and the first human beings, who were made in his image. While Genesis raises many questions to consider, it also reveals a breadth of conception, artistry, and spiritual and psychological insight that is simply breathtaking, as we shall soon see!



Historical Context

Though the authorship of Genesis is still debated among scholars, Jewish tradition, and the Bible itself, ascribes the authorship of Genesis and the first five books of the Bible to Moses. The date of Genesis is also debated. Many scholars believe it came to be written down around 1300 BC. But one thing is certain: by then, the material in Genesis was not new. It had been orally transmitted for generations. Oral tradition is more accurate than we might think, because the material was structured for easy memorization and it was regarded as sacred.

Who was Moses? He was a Hebrew baby, rescued in a basket from the River Nile by an Egyptian princess. He was raised in the palace as a prince and received the finest education available in his day. But as an adult he left all the luxuries of royal life to accept God's call to liberate his own people from Egyptian slavery and take them to the promised land. Moses led a people who had lived in a world where those around them believed in many, competing gods. Genesis told them how to start looking at life from God's perspective.

How does this ancient document relate to us today? The Israelites needed to know the answers to the big questions of life—and so do we! Who is God? What is my relationship to him? How does knowing God affect the way that I live? Genesis provides exciting answers to life's greatest questions!



Bible Study

Read Genesis 1 v 1 – 2 v 3

The Israelites had been exposed to the pagan myths of Egypt. They had heard how these many Egyptian deities constantly quarrelled; how the birth of the universe coincided with the gods' battles and their love affairs. These gods were not free and distinct from the world; they didn't stand outside of the world. So the first verse of the Bible would have been a jaw-dropper, because it stood in stark contrast to everything they had heard about pagan deities, and broke all the mythologies of the ancient East.

1. Whether you were a Hebrew who had lived all your life in a neighboring pagan country, or had never even heard of God before, what would you have learned about God already in verse 1?

o What did God need in order to be able to create the universe, and why is that so significant?

2. What was the earth like in the beginning?

o Genesis shows us that God created the heavens and the earth, but the earth was formless and empty until God brought order, beauty and harmony into being. What does that tell us about God's nature?

As we read the entirety of Scripture, we discover, unsurprisingly, that God's nature is complex. God is described as having a plurality within the unity of his being: he is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Even as early as Genesis 1 v 1-3, we see hints of the nature of God—that he is one, but there is a distinction within the oneness. God the Father took initiative through speaking his word, but we also see in verse 2 that the Spirit was involved. Later in the New Testament, we learn that Jesus, the Son of God, was the Father's agent in creation: "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1 v 3). So even as early as Genesis, we have an inkling of the complex nature of God.

3. What does it reveal about God that his commands produce such immediate results?

o What does it reveal about God's nature that he chooses to use words? Why does anyone use words?

4. We see that God issues commands and it is done. But it isn't merely through words that God expresses himself. God is described in verse 2 as a Spirit who hovers over what he has made.

Think of someone in your natural life who “hovers” over loved ones. What does that image reveal about God?

In just the first three verses we learn that God is eternal, without beginning or end. There has never been a time when God was not. He has absolute authority, and created the earth out of non-being; he needed no help. Not only did God's word accomplish exactly what he wanted to accomplish, but God spoke because he wants to be known. He is a communicative God who desires relationship. The Creator God is also not a raw, impersonal power but a personal God, who hovers over his creation like a nurturing parent: a deity brimming with love, delight and nurturing concern.

Christian opinions differ over how we should interpret Genesis 1. But whether we come to the view that God completed the job of creation in six literal twenty-four-hour days, or over a much longer period, the one thing that is absolutely clear is this: God is the creator of all things.

5. What are the repeated words and phrases that occur six times? What does God's response to what he has created reveal about his nature (v 3-24)?

6. What did the commands of the first three days produce?

7. What were the results and purpose of God's commands of the next three days?

8. The biblical attitude to the material world is very different from that of many philosophies and religions which are concerned only with the spiritual and the soul. Their understanding of salvation involves the soul being released from the body to join the non-material world where God lives. But here we read that God joyfully declares that the material world he has created is "good."

How does this shape the way in which we view the physical realm: our bodies, nature, animals and the earth?

9. How were man and woman different from the rest of creation (1 v 26-27)?

o What do you think it means to be made in God's image?

10. What did God commission the man and the woman to do (v 28-30)?

The implications of God's commands are profound. To "be fruitful and increase in number" means to develop the social world: build families, churches, schools, cities, governments, and laws. The second phrase, "subdue [the earth]," means to harness the natural world: plant crops, design computers, create art, compose music or build bridges. In other words, God commissioned human beings to be his vice-regents—to love, protect and nourish all that he had made.

o How does God's evaluation of his creation change after he has created humans (v 31)?

11. How was the seventh day of creation unique (2 v 1-3)?

o The Jewish practice commanded by God (Exodus 20 v 8-11) of a "Sabbath rest" (resting on the seventh day of every week) was directly linked to God's example here.

Why is this command important in our frantic, work-without-boundaries culture?

In Hebrews 4 v 9-11 we are told that it is possible for us to enter God's rest permanently. The New Testament makes it clear that the practice of "Sabbath rest" also points to the deeper understanding of learning to rest in Christ for our salvation, rather than in our works.

Live What You Learn

Genesis makes it clear that while God created the world, he is still above and beyond all that he has made and distinct from it. God created everything, which means that physical matter is neither evil nor divine—it is simply good because it comes from God. But to worship anything God has made (humans, animals or nature) is considered to be idolatry in the Bible, a very serious offense. Everything God created is intended to lead us to worship God, rather than worship what he created!

- *The Westminster Shorter Catechism says: "What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy him forever." What have you learned about God that causes you to worship him more fully and to enjoy his presence?*

Following Jesus: The Trinity

- In order for us to know what God is like, God must reveal who he is: and God has done exactly that! He came to us as a person: Jesus of Nazareth.
- At Jesus' baptism (Luke 3 v 21-22) we see the three-fold essence of God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus always spoke of God as his Father.
- *What then is the Trinity?* It's not simple! There is one God, who exists eternally in three, distinct, equally divine Persons, who have shared each other's life in perfect love for all eternity.
- *The idea of God being a Trinity is very exciting!* At the center of the universe, God is a divine relationship.

- *Why does this matter so much?* Being made in God's image means we're designed for love relationships. It explains why we're wired for intimacy.
- Each Person in the Godhead (the Trinity) lives in self-giving and other-receiving love. We must reflect this way of divine love: loving people and using things, but never the reverse.
- The Trinity reveals that God is love: and he invites us in!

Praying Together

- Take time to praise God for being a God of order, power and creativity. Thank Him for being the Author and King of all creation.
- Thank him for wanting to be personally involved in our lives.
- Ask him to help you to know him better, and to order your lives in accordance with his wisdom so that you may better reflect his image to others.

You'll find some more books about the themes of this session on page 61.

Going Deeper: Why Work Matters

A much missed and rather surprising aspect of Genesis 1–2 is that it shows us that God is a worker—and that we are created to be workers, too.

Our first glimpse of God is God on a working day—six of them, in fact! We see God at work in the creation of the universe in general and our own planet in particular: “We see God the supreme biologist and botanist, the engineer of the Alps and the ant, the architect of galaxies and the designer of butterflies and the first artist, who not only works in color, but invented it!” (Peter Lewis, *The Glory of Christ*). God creates not as some distant force or detached mind, but as a working Person, who marveled and delighted at what he created.

Not only that, but the creatures he made in his image—you and me—were also created to work. At the start, man and woman were given a specific mandate to rule over the creation, to fill the earth and to subdue it, and to enjoy its fruits (1 v 28-30). The work of creation has been finished in its fundamental

stages, but human beings are given the “creation project” to develop and manage the earth. We are to take what God has made and shape it and use it for God’s good purposes.

There are no negative aspects about work in Genesis 1 and 2, because work is a blessing. As we’ll see in Session Three when we reach Genesis 3, work has been spoiled, along with everything else in the world, by the human race’s rebellion against God. Now, though work can be fulfilling, it is also often frustrating. Yet work is still one way that we reflect our God-image. God made us to be like him in his creativity and development. We will never build utopia—that will only come about when Christ returns to establish the new earth. But we can work and partner with God to make the world a little bit closer to God’s original design. Our work matters.

Our motive for work is to bring God glory in everything we do. How do we glorify God through our work? First, by recognizing that we are not primarily servants of human beings, but of Christ! We live to serve him in all we do—and that makes all the difference. Second, by consciously relying on God’s power to help us do our work creatively and well. Third, by striving to do our job with excellence because we worship a God of excellence. That means a secretary’s typing should be accurate and sharp, the surgeon’s incisions should be clean, and the meals we feed our families are to be nutritious and pleasing—because God is a God of order and beauty and excellence. All work is worthy and worthwhile when it is a response to God’s calling, done in God’s way, for his glory.

We work to provide for our legitimate needs. The apostle Paul was one of the greatest missionaries who ever lived. He was also a tentmaker by trade and he used his work to cover his own expenses. We were not made for inactivity or unproductiveness. Our capacity and need to work is part of our human dignity and significance. The Bible has strong words for those who are idle—those who can work, but do not: “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.’ We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive ... Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat” (2 Thessalonians 3 v 10-12). Paul is clear that to refuse to work when one is able and a job is available is sinful.

We work to provide for the needs of others. It is through our vocation that we obey God’s call to serve our neighbor and partner with God in loving care for the world. The joy of work is that it enables us to provide for our children when they are young, or relieve the suffering of those who have experienced drought or displacement, or contribute to the beauty or functionality of the surroundings that others live in. The apostle Paul said: “In everything I did, I showed you

[the church in Ephesus] that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20 v 35).

Our work provides opportunity for witness. When we work, we are normally shoulder to shoulder with those who do not know the Lord. We witness through our *being* by revealing the beauty of the character of Christ. That means we do not engage in gossip or office politics and we rejoice when another receives the promotion we wished for. We witness through our *doing* by doing our job with excellence and by demonstrating acts of kindness. "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5 v 6). And we witness through *telling*, though usually this is outside our work hours, because our boss doesn't pay us to take time off work to present the gospel. It takes people time to see how we live our lives. But people pay attention. As trust develops and we talk at lunch or invite friends for a coffee or dinner, they will probably be curious about what makes us tick and may have wondered what makes us different.

There will be work in eternity! When the prophets look forward to the renewal of the earth when Christ returns at the end of history, they do not imagine that work ceases. Rather, they speak of building, planting and enjoying the fruits of one's labours (Isaiah 65 v 21-22). When God recreates this world perfectly, it will be a planet of activity and discovery—of work that is always fulfilling, and never frustrating, just as God designed it to be.

Reflection Questions

One thing that enables us to see the importance of our work is when we understand what the Bible has to say about our profession.

- *If you were to describe the nature of your work (or your present focus of study) in just one word, what would it be?*
- *What does the Bible say about your work? For example, for journalists (truth); for doctors (healing); for lawyers (justice); for raising children (wisdom); for helping professions (service).*
- *How does this biblical knowledge help you understand how to glorify Christ through your work? For example, Christians who are artists should not be unremittingly dark (as so much contemporary art is), nor sentimental or saccharine or simply commercial (doing whatever sells).*