

Some books start off with such great lines that they are remembered for their opening phrase. “It was a dark and stormy night” is not only the opening to every novel Snoopy from Peanuts ever wrote, but it was originally penned by Edward Bulwer-Lytton in the novel *Paul Clifford* (1830). Or consider Dickens’ famous opening to *A Tale of Two Cities*: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” As Melville begins *Moby Dick*, we hear the words, “Call me Ishmael.”

A great story has a great first line. And one of the best opening lines comes in the Bible Story. In it we hear about the main character, what he’s like, and what he is doing. But unlike a tale of fiction, the Bible is the history of God and his work. As we open to Genesis 1, we hear these famous words: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”

While hundreds of sermons could be preached on each part of what we are looking at this morning, let’s do a fly-by and get a quick glimpse of the greatest story ever told.

Meet God – Giver of Life (Gen. 1:1)

The first line introduces us to the main character – God. And from these opening words, we discover a lot about him:

- a. Eternal – In the beginning, God. He has always been. He didn’t have any start. As a child, this idea would confound me. I would ask my dad about this, and being the mathematician that he is, he would say, “Where does a circle start?” I’d look confused or give some goofy answer, to which he would reply, “There is no start and there is no end!” In the same way, God always has been.
- b. Self-Sufficient (Aseity) – Since God existed before all things, he has never lacked. You and I wake up in the morning and need food, coffee, and a shower! But God has never been lacking.
- c. Sovereign Owner – He created the heavens and the earth. Everything that exists belongs to him because he made it. As the Creator, he has the rightful ownership of it.
- d. Distinct (Transcendent) – because God created the heavens and the earth, he isn’t part of the creation. He is distinct from it. He isn’t like the gods of many eastern religions that claim that nature is divine or that this planet is “Mother Earth.” No – God created all, but he stands apart from his creation, and is not changed because of creation.
- e. Goodness – As God fills the three story universe, we hear the repeated refrain “and it was good” (1:9, 12, 18, 21, 25). Everything that God makes is good because God is good.

So in the few words that we hear in Genesis 1, we meet a great God. And all of these things point out how God is sufficient to give life. He doesn't create because he is lonely. He doesn't create and feel exhausted. He creates because out of the abundance of his eternal goodness, he wants to show that life is found in him.

Meet Humanity – The Kiss of Life (Gen. 1:26-31; 2:4-7)

Meeting God gives us a sense that this story is not random, accidental, or happenstance. When we believe that life is a random chance, life becomes cheap. And when life is cheap, it becomes disposable – whether you're in the womb or in the nursing home or any place in between.

Because God is the Good Creator and Sovereign Owner, he defines who we are. We find out two things about humanity:

- a. **Made in the Image** – there has been a lot of ink spilt to define what it means that humanity is made in the image of God. But some things are very clear. First, humans are distinct from animals. God made all of the animals, but none were made in his image. And second, being made in the image of God is to be like God in some way and to represent him. In the ancient world, kings would mark their territory with little statues of themselves, designating the places of their rule. In the same way, God makes little images of himself, with purpose and design, unique and beautiful, to show that this world is his place where he rules.
- b. **Male and Female** – the second thing that God does is he defines that humans are made as complementary to one another – male and female. He orders biology so that there is no confusion that both male and female are to display God's beauty, kingship, and rule here on earth. Male and female are equal in worth, value, while distinct in roles and functions, but both displaying the rule of God as his kings and queens on earth as it is in heaven.
- c. **In Adam** – But as the Bible story moves on, we discover a lot more about creation. Paul tells us in Romans 5 discover that Adam was given a responsibility as the head. He was to be the sacrificial leader to do the work of a prophet (teaching the Word of God by communicating the commands of God), priest (by mediating God's presence to the world by being fruitful and multiplying), and a king (by ruling over creation, expanding the garden, and caring for its well-being). In a sense, Adam is the head of a covenant, and we will see how these roles continue in their importance in the Bible story. He represents all of humanity, and his success would be our success, and his failure would be our failure.

The name "Adam" is the word "human". And he is what one person has called "the kiss of life" (Colin Smith, *Unlocking the Bible Story*). God, the Giver of Life, bent down and kissed us with his love, his blessing, his peace, and his presence. He made us unique as

his rulers to bring his Word, his Presence, and his Order to this world. He made us to spread life through the gifts of life.

Discover the gifts of life

What are those gifts to spread life?

- a. Work (2:15-17) – the first gift is work. We normally associate work as a bad four letter word. But from the beginning, God gave work as a precious gift. Adam was to till the soil, cultivate the ground, plant trees, and expand the garden. He was to spread the image of God, the rule of God, and the presence of God throughout the world. The language of “work and keep” are the same words used of priests later in the Bible story. And so we learn that one way we minister and serve is through our work. God has intended that our work be life-giving and life sustaining. Our work is to serve others for their well-being. Our work is a vital part of the gift of life, and should be used to enhance life. From the farmer who works and keeps the land to be life-sustaining to the doctor who operates to restore the health of life, every job is intended to be life-giving and life-sustaining. And the results of work should be enjoyment and satisfaction, just as God enjoyed and was satisfied in his work (2:1-3).

- b. Marriage (2:18-24) – but it was not good that Adam was alone. After naming all the animals, there was a loneliness that set in. Adam noticed that while other animals had companions, he did not. So God gave him a queen as a companion to help him rule over creation, someone from his very side. When Adam sees this woman, he says, “Woah, man!” And in a covenant formula, Adam takes Eve as his wife. The two become one – and the gift of marriage between a man and a woman is defined for us here. Holy, set apart for one another, and to have children to be life-giving to the world, marriage was given as a gift of relationship, companionship, and procreation.

Discover the purpose of life (Gen. 2:1-3; 3:8)

But what’s the point of all of this? Why did the life-giving God create all of this? We get three hints. The first comes in Gen. 2:1-3. After God creates everything, God rested. Now God didn’t rest because he was tired, but because he was satisfied and was enjoying his creation. Like a great artist who finishes their masterpiece, they love to set it up, look at it, and enjoy it. In the same way, the God who never gets tired stepped back from all that he had created, looked at it, and made a final, seventh day and blessed it. And the blessing of that day was rest.

But the second hint we get about why God made all of this comes in the next chapter – Gen. 3:8. In the cool of the day, as God was coming to enjoy the beginning of a day of rest with his royal image bearers, we are told that he walked among them.

The last hint comes in 2:10-14. Many people read these verses and wonder why the description of rivers and precious stones are mentioned. It seems out of place to us as

modern readers. But later in the Bible story, what we discover is that the dwellingplace of God is filled with streams of mercy and stones of precious value. In other words, this place called Eden is a temple, a dwellingplace where God and humanity were intended to meet. The goal of all of this was simple – that humanity would find rest for their souls by being in the presence of God and enjoying God forever.

See the Glory of Christ (Col. 1:15-

The Bible story moves on, and next week we will see how Adam failed to be the prophet, priest, and king. He did not reflect the rule of God in the image of God. But before time began, God had set a plan in place that all of these things would point to him, reflect him, and show how great he is.

In Colossians 1:15-20, the apostle Paul quotes what was probably an early hymn of the first Christians. And in this hymn, we read these words (READ Col. 1:15-20).

And what do we discover?

- Col. 1:15 – Jesus is the perfect Image of God. He reflects his rule, reign, and power. As the God-man, Jesus shows us perfectly what the Creator God is like in his sovereign rule and goodness.
- Col 1:16 – He is the Creator of all things. John 1 tells us that when God said, what came out of his mouth was the Word. God ordered all that was made, but it was made by Christ.
- Col. 1:17 – Not only does Christ make all things, but he is the Sustainer of all. He keeps things held together so that they do not fall apart.
- Col. 1:18 – And as we discover that Adam failed in his headship, Christ does not. He shows us how power is to be used – to restore the joy of life by going to the cross, suffering in our place, and bringing peace.

What makes the Bible story great is how the beginning is filled with whispers, but it ends with all of these themes brought together. They come together in Jesus. The marriage supper of humanity with the Lamb. The image of God restored. The rule of God covering the entire world. And the goal of creation realized – God with man is pleased to dwell.

As we go into the rest of our Sunday, in the midst of a world that is filled with chaos, confusion, and covid, take a walk in God’s good creation. Take a deep breath. Smell the fresh air. And know that there is not one square inch of this earth over which Christ does not say, “Mine!” (cf. Abraham Kuyper, “There is not a *square inch* in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!”)