

The Creation and You

BELIEVERS' BOOT CAMP

Genesis 1:26-31
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How many of you have served in the military? Every soldier has one thing in common. They have all been to boot camp. They have been through basic training. Apparently, there are certain basics that are important to all soldiers. It doesn't matter whether you fix electronics, pilot a helicopter, carry a stretcher, fire an M-16 or command a company. There are certain basics you must master before you set foot anywhere else in the military. Anybody know what those are? Well, for one you've got to follow orders. It doesn't matter whether you agree, whether they seem crazy or whether you dislike who is giving them. You must follow orders. You must submit to authority. In boot camp you are primarily tested on that among other things.

What do you suppose would constitute a boot camp for believers? What would we learn in basic training? The ALPHA program is a boot camp of sorts. It introduces people to the basics of Christianity over 10 weeks. It gives people a taste of Christian fellowship through meals and participation in a small group. It asks the central question, "Who is Jesus?" It addresses major themes of Christianity: forgiveness, prayer, the Bible, the church, evil, the Holy Spirit. ALPHA is a good development process for Christians, but it is especially designed for people who aren't Christians, people who have questions or objections. Boot camp, however, is for people who have already chosen sides. They have enlisted. What would be the basics for believers? In the next 7 weeks, I will share 7 basic teachings critical for living as a believer in Jesus Christ. We'll hold a *Believers' Boot Camp*. Are you ready for the journey?

Issue #1 is “Who are you?” You might think the first issue is “Who is God?” That is logical and that is primary. However, the Bible God gave us begins with you. It speaks and explains God’s creation of you. It focuses on and reveals who you are.

In our church newsletter that comes out this week, I pose the question, “Who Am I?” In our society some people come out and say, “I am gay.” By that they mean I’m a homosexual by constitution and not by choice. In many cases, certainly not all, but in many, the people saying this have unsuccessfully fought with urges and desires that they hated. When they say their homosexual, they believe they are not making a choice but accepting an inevitable fact that they resisted for a long time. They think their sexual attraction may not be normal for society, but they believe it is normal for them. Three decades of research by activists have located no biological cause for these attractions. Even if they did isolate a biological factor that would not mean the attractions and behavior are healthy. We suffer a lot of unhealthy biology, don’t we? That is why this city is a medical center. We suffer unhealthy biology even from birth! Those who come to accept themselves as gay often will minimize the personal health consequences of their actions. Our society minimizes the social and spiritual consequences. Sadly, society and much of the church are clueless to the forces at work in our lives and the power of God that is available to us today. For most people, including theologians and pastors, Jesus’ life and ministry seem like ancient stories rather than God’s will for us today. Words Jesus spoke to some Sadducees ring in my ears:

You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.
(Matthew 22:29, NIV)

The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection or a spirit world because they couldn’t observe it with their natural eyes. Jesus rebuked them because pretentiously they claimed to follow the Scriptures but denied these truths. Though they were students of the Scriptures, their

unbelief made them ignorant of both what it said and what God's power can do and is doing. That's our problem too. We make assumptions about who we are without fully understanding the Scriptures and God's power. We define ourselves by our race, or our roles, or our strengths and our struggles. In 12-step programs we teach people to say, "I am an alcoholic." I know that confession is a way of cutting through the denial so that people get help. "I'm bipolar." That confession has helped people accept that they need to continue to take medication when they feel good. However, are they alcoholics? Or are they God's children who suffer from alcoholism? Are they bipolar? Or are they God's children who suffer from a mental illness that we classify as bipolar? That may seem like a small distinction, but the words *I am* are powerful. How you define yourself can rob you or release you to fulfill your destiny.

One Sabbath Jesus was teaching in a synagogue. A woman, who was bent over and could not straighten up caught his eye. He stopped his teaching and called her forward. She had been stooped over for 18 years. She was stuck in that position not because of a genetic defect, but because of an evil spirit. She had become stooped over some time after her birth. When Jesus healed her, he was criticized for violating the Sabbath law. Jesus answered his critics:

You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her? (Luke 13:15-16, NIV)

Why did Jesus' critics value their ox or donkey more than this woman? To them she was a cripple, but to Jesus she was a daughter of Abraham, an heir to a special covenant with almighty God. She was bound by Satan and needed to be loosed to drink freely as an heir. Her handicap was the oppression of her. It was not her. The words *I am* can rob us or release us, can't they?

Are you ready to discover who you actually are? Are you ready to hear what God did with you and what God says about you? Let's turn to Genesis, chapter 1.

The first words spoken about you and me in the Bible are these:

“Let us make people in our image, to be like ourselves. They will be masters over all life — the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the livestock, wild animals, and small animals.” So God created people in his own image; God patterned them after himself; male and female he created them. God blessed them and told them, “Multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. Be masters over the fish and birds and all the animals.” (Genesis 1:26-28, NLT)

God has spoken. God wants you to know that he chose to make not just one person, but humanity. He chose to make us male and female in his image, in his own likeness.

In the days when these Scriptures were written down, people might have thought that a statue or idol was an image of God. They may have been taught that their king bore the image of God, but they would never have imagined that they themselves were so special.

What did it mean to be made in God's image? And what does it mean to be formed in his likeness? There are three implications: relationships, roles and realities.

It impacts relationships. We were created to have a special relationship with God. When Adam was made in God's image, he was not a clone of God. He was a child of God. The Bible in Genesis 5:1-3 says that Adam, though he did not give birth, had a son in his image, in his own likeness, named Seth. The Bible uses the language of *father to child* in describing our creation. You were created a child of God. You might be estranged, disobedient or afflicted, but at root you are a child of almighty God. You were created in his image.

The more you learn about God, the more you'll discover about yourself because you were made in God's image. For example, God is spirit. You are spirit too. You can commune with God in spirit. You are capable of that because you are not just a collection of biological organs. In Genesis 2, verse 7, God breathed his spirit into humanity, and then they became living beings.

We are spiritual. Moreover, God is love. You were made in the image of love. You have a hunger to love. You also have a hunger to be loved. That's a part of your nature just as it is part of God's. He enjoys loving you and being loved by you. That's why you are his child.

The first implication is *relationships*. The second is *roles*. God said that we were made in the image of a master to be masters. It is critical that we honor that. God does.

Like God we are never to manipulate people. We are not to pull their strings or push their buttons or use them in any way. If we do, we have violated a master, a ruler. We have stepped over our authority and sinned both against them and God who made them. Every person is a ruler. Look at the person next to you and say, "You are a ruler." Point to yourself and say, "I'm a master and a child of God."

We were made to be made masters, and we were made to multiply. Perhaps your biology has not permitted you to multiply, but your spirit can enable you. Through loving ministry you can multiply and fill the earth with your children. Indeed, that is your role; for you were made in the image of your heavenly father.

The third implication I called *realities*. Since you were made in the image of God, there's infinitely more to you than what our crude sciences are able to observe. You are so much more. Your potential is so much more. Perhaps, that is why Jesus said, "***Everything is possible for the one who believes.***" This has not been obvious because we are under attack. To understand who you are and to be all you were made to be, God sent Jesus. Jesus came as savior because we need one. Jesus came as teacher because we need one. Jesus came as Lord because we need his authority exercised to regain our rightful identity and authority.

You can know Jesus. He will help you answer the question, "Who am I?" As a result, every relationship, every role and your grasp of reality will change and amaze you.