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## Chapter 1

# The Original Plan

Genesis 1:26-31, 2:7-8, 15-25

**UNDERSTANDING**

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UNDERSTANDING

# WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

*Read Genesis 1:26–31, 2:7–8, 15–25*

## The Big Picture

Studying the creation of Adam and Eve helps us to understand our ultimate goal and the purpose of our femininity.

On any journey, in order to understand where we are and where we're going, we first have to know where we started. This is what the book of Genesis is all about. In a speech during the World Day of Peace in 1995, Pope St. John Paul II, speaking about God's original plan for the human couple, stated, "We need to return to this plan, to proclaim it forcefully, so that women in particular—who have suffered more from its failure to be fulfilled—can finally give full expression to their womanhood and their dignity."<sup>1</sup> The Holy Father encourages us to look at the creation of Adam and Eve in order to better understand God's purpose in creating man and woman. Likewise, he encourages us to look at God the Father's original plan for this first couple so that we can more fully understand and live out our femininity.

<sup>1</sup>Pope John Paul II, Message for the XXVIII World Day of Peace: "Women, Teachers of Peace" (Rome: Vatican, 1995).

## **A Communion of Love (Genesis 1:26–31)**

God said, “Let *us* make man in *our* image.” Have you ever noticed that He uses the plural “us” and “our”? Why is there a plural reference to God in verse 26 (“our”), and then a singular reference in verse 27 (“His”)? These verses give us a glimpse into the inner life of God. God is a Trinity—one God (i.e., “His”) in three divine persons (i.e., “our”). He is a union, or communion, of persons.

We all know the Scripture verse “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8), and the Catechism of the Catholic Church gives us a beautiful explanation of what this means and how it affects us: “God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange” (CCC 221). This “eternal exchange of love” of the Trinity flows from God the Father: God makes a total gift of Himself (because God is love, and love gives itself freely), and this gift begets the Son. The Son, seeing the total gift of the Father, responds by making a total gift of Himself in return. The love between them is itself the person of the Holy Spirit.

If both men and women are created in the image and likeness of God, a few things are then true: In addition to possessing equal dignity and the gifts of reason and will, it also means that we are *designed* to imitate the Trinity’s communion of love and self-giving.

## **Helpmates (Genesis 2:7–8, 15–25)**

The second chapter of Genesis provides a more descriptive and metaphorical account of Creation that helps us understand the fundamental and profound truths concerning man created as male *and* female in the image and likeness of God.

In this second account, Eve is not on the scene at first: God creates Adam and then announces, “It is not good that the man should be

alone; I will make a helper fit for him.” But God’s next move is to create the animals and have Adam name them. This may seem like a strange task, but it helps Adam to realize something about himself: Even after seeing and naming all of the animals, Adam is left feeling alone because “there was not found a helper fit for him.” Adam was not made simply to till the garden and rule over the animals. There is still something missing.

It is only then that God culminates his act of creation by forming Eve from the rib of Adam. St. Thomas Aquinas explains that Eve was made from Adam’s rib to show that they are equal in dignity: Eve was not created from Adam’s head to rule over him, nor was she created from his feet to be ruled by him. Rather, she was created from his rib, to rule *with* him.

And what does Adam think of God’s new creation? “At last!” he proclaims. He immediately recognizes this being as “flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone,” and for this reason, she is called “woman.” Adam is euphoric. You can almost hear him gasp in awe as he recognizes what a great companion God has created—not only beautiful, but someone who is like him. Eve is different from all other creatures that Adam has so far encountered, in part because, like him, she is a human person who can give and receive love. In Adam’s eyes, even her very body speaks to this ability to give and receive love in a way that complements his. His body speaks the same to her.

Pope John Paul II elaborates on this complementarity in *Mulieris Dignitatem*: “The woman is another ‘I’ in a common humanity. From the very beginning they appear as a ‘unity of the two,’ and this signifies that the original solitude is overcome, the solitude in which man does not find ‘a helper fit for him’ (Gen 2:20). Is it only a question here of ‘helper’ in activity, in ‘subduing the earth’ (Gen 1:28)? Certainly it is a matter of a life’s companion, with whom, as a wife,

the man can unite himself, becoming with her 'one flesh' and for this reason leaving 'his father and his mother' (Gen 2:24).<sup>2</sup> Physically and spiritually, man and woman are not the same but instead complement each other. Together they express the fullness of humanity.

### **Application to Jesus**

God the Father sent the Son, the second person of the Trinity, to earth to show us the ultimate example of self-giving love in Jesus' death on the cross.

### **Trinitarian Love**

Before woman was created, Adam was limited in his capacity to image the Trinity and give of himself in love to another human person. As the Second Vatican Council reminds us, "Man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself."<sup>3</sup> After Eve is created, Adam recognizes her as a perfect recipient for his gift of self. "At last," someone of his nature whom he can love, and from whom he can receive love in return. Even their physical communion images the Trinity: As the love between the Father and Son begets another divine person (the Holy Spirit), the physical love between a man and woman has the potential to create another *human* person. By experiencing this physical and spiritual exchange of love in marriage, men and women can more perfectly know, understand, and experience the love of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

<sup>2</sup>John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* [Apostolic Letter on the Dignity and Vocation of Women], 6.

<sup>3</sup>Vatican Council II, "*Gaudium et Spes* [Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World]," 24.

**Application to Our Lives**

We were not made to go through this life alone. Do we ever try to be more autonomous and self-sufficient than is good for us?



DISCUSSION

# DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

*Genesis 1:26–31, 2:7–8, 15–25*

## **STEP 1: OPENER**

Share with the group a situation in which you thought you were doing everything right or were on the right track, only to discover that you hadn't been given the right directions or instructions to begin with.

## **STEP 2: BACKDROP**

Whenever we want to know whether we are doing something right, we need to go back to the original design or instructions. In terms of what it means to be a human being, this is what the beginning of the book of Genesis is all about. Through figurative language and metaphorical explanations of actual events, the author gives us deep insights into the big questions of life, including what it means to be male and female.

## **STEP 3: PASSAGE**

Read Genesis 1:26–31, 2:7–8, 15–25.

## **STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

Note that answers appear in italics.



## Exploration: Questions and Answers

Read Genesis 1:26–31.

**1. Why is there a plural reference to God in verse 26 and a singular reference in verse 27?**

*God is a Trinity: one God (“his”) in three divine persons (“our”). He is a union, or communion, of persons.*

**2. CCC 221 says that “God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange.” What do you think it means for the Trinity to be an “eternal exchange of love”?**

*The “eternal exchange of love” of the Trinity flows from God the Father, making a total gift of Himself (because God is love and this is what love does), which begets the Son. The Son, seeing the total gift of the Father, responds by making a total gift of Himself in return. The love between them is personified in the Holy Spirit.*

**3. If we know that God is an exchange of love, what does being created in His image and likeness mean for us?**

*It means that we are created to share the same characteristics of the Trinity: to live in a communion of love, to give and receive love.*

**4. An obvious way to live out an exchange of love is within one's vocation (marriage, priesthood, religious life). However, how can we live it out now, if we have not yet found our primary vocation? Feel free to be specific.**

*First and most importantly, by giving ourselves in love to God. Next, in seeking out community and giving of ourselves to those around us: for example, being charitable to our roommates and family, being quick to forgive and to ask for forgiveness, making sacrifices for others, letting others have their way instead of insisting upon our own, etc.*

**Read Genesis 2: 7-8, 15-25.**

**5. Why did God think it wasn't good for Adam to be alone?**

*Adam didn't have a helper/companion.*

**6. What did Adam come to understand about himself through living, at first, alone? How did this affect his understanding of Eve as gift?**

*Adam was able to understand for himself what he needed (or didn't need) to be complete. He experienced what John Paul II calls the "original solitude" so that, when God created Eve, Adam would appreciate her and know how she was different from all the other creatures.*

**7. How does the world try and mislead us, as women, about what we really need to be complete? Which messages are particularly enticing to you personally?**

*Allow the group to discuss.*

**8. How do you feel about Eve being created from Adam (or, more specifically, his rib)?**

*This could elicit a host of responses, some positive and some negative. Allow the group to discuss. Share St. Thomas Aquinas's insight into this passage, found in the "Helpmates" section of "What do I need to know about this passage?," as one possible explanation.*

**9. What do you think of Adam's initial reaction to Eve?**

*Allow the group to discuss.*

**10. How is Eve different from all other creatures?**

*Like Adam, Eve has reason and free will. Because of these gifts, she also has the capacity to give and receive love so that, together, the man and woman image the Trinity in a communion of love.*

**11. A document produced during the Second Vatican Council teaches us that, "Man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself."<sup>4</sup> How does this relate to Adam and Eve? How does this relate to you?**

*Before Eve was created, Adam's self-understanding was limited, because there was not another human to whom he could make a true gift of himself. Similarly, each of us will only come to truly know ourselves when we exist as a gift for others.*

<sup>4</sup>Vatican Council II, "Gaudium et Spes," 24.

**12. What does it mean for Eve to be a “helper” to Adam?**

*Adam and Eve share in work and God's commandment to “subdue the earth” but, as John Paul II says, “Certainly it is a matter of a life's companion, with whom, as a wife, the man can unite himself, becoming with her ‘one flesh’ and for this reason leaving ‘his father and his mother’ (Genesis 2:24).” As discussed above, they also help each other to be who they were made to be by giving and receiving love.*

**13. How can we be “helpers” to the men around us and assist them in being who God created them to be?**

*Allow the group to discuss. Ideas: We can help them discover their calling to imitate God in self-giving by modeling generosity ourselves. We can encourage them in their work and in their pursuit of virtue.*

**14. How does the physical union of a man and woman in marriage help each to understand the Trinity better?**

*Through their union, they can better understand God as a communion of persons in love. Also, just as the love between the Father and Son itself begets another divine person (the Holy Spirit), so the physical communion between a man and a woman has the potential to participate in the creation of another human person.*



