

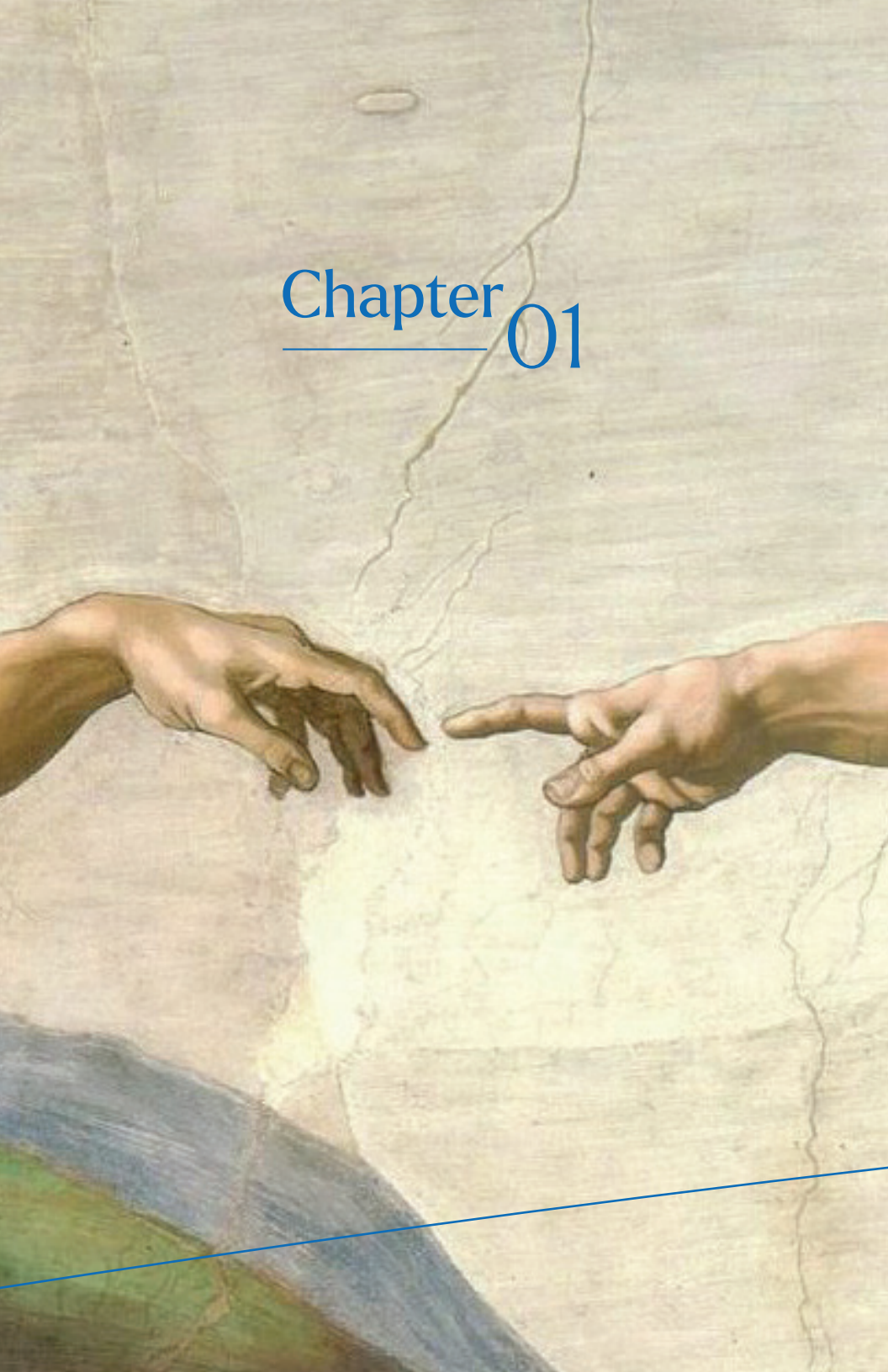
The Purpose of The Crux

The Crux Bible Study is meant to walk people through an initial encounter with Jesus Christ and his Gospel, culminating in an invitation to make Christ the center of one's life within the context of his Church. With this aim in mind, Bible study leaders should prepare to share the Gospel with participants as soon as the fourth chapter, "Reconciliation II: The Cross," is completed.



For resources on sharing the Gospel,
check out FOCUS Equip at <https://focusequip.org>.



A detail of Michelangelo's famous fresco 'The Creation of Adam' from the Sistine Chapel. It shows two hands reaching toward each other: the hand of God on the right, extended from a reclining position, and the hand of Adam on the left, reaching out from a similar reclining position. The fingertips are just inches apart, creating a sense of tension and divine spark. The background is the aged, cracked plaster of the original work.

Chapter 01

Relationship

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UNDERSTANDING

What do I need to know about this passage?

Who Am I? What Am I Made For?

Who am I? What am I made for? These are some of the most important questions we face in life. And there's one famous story that points us in the right direction. It's a story you might have heard before, perhaps from your childhood. But we invite you, now that you are an adult, to take a closer look at it with more mature eyes. Genesis is a book about beginnings. In fact, the word Genesis means "beginnings." In this first chapter of the Crux, we are going to talk about what the first few chapters of Genesis tell us about God, about us and about our relationship with him.

Made for Relationship

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

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In its very first chapter, the Bible makes an amazing claim about who we are — one that impacts everything about how we look at the world and live our lives: we are made in God's image and likeness (Genesis 1:26).

But what does that actually mean?

As in any piece of literature, the Bible uses reoccurring expressions or idioms. If you're not sure what a certain word means, you should consider the context, to see how it's used in other settings. So, if we want to understand the meaning of being made in God's image and likeness, we should look to see if the expression is used again. And it is, in Genesis 5:3, where it describes a relationship between a son and his father. Adam has a son named Seth, and Seth is in the image and likeness of his father, Adam. In Scripture, therefore, the idea of image and likeness points to sonship.

When God says in Genesis 1 that man and woman are made in his "image and likeness," what is he saying about us? He is revealing that we are not mere creatures like the sun, moon, stars, birds, fish or animals. We are made for a profound relationship with God as his children. The Catholic Church puts it this way: "God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life (CCC 1).

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Think about that: God did not have any need to create us – he is perfectly blessed in himself. Yet, as the Bible teaches, “God is love” (1 John 4:8), and out of love, he freely chose to bring us into existence and fill us with his life, so that he could share his love with us. This is the first major point we want to take away from the story of Adam and Eve: When the Bible says we were made in God’s “image and likeness,” it’s telling us we were created for a unique relationship with God as his children. And this is where we will find enduring, lasting happiness: living in friendship with God as his sons and daughters.

God’s Plan (Genesis 2:15-17)

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”

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A second major point this story reveals is that God has a plan for our lives. This is something the Bible often underscores: how God loves us so much that he wants us to be happy and to be united with him forever. That’s why God created Adam and Eve in a state of utter harmony. Harmony with him, with one another, within themselves, and even with the rest of creation. He wants what is best for us.

This is also why he gives us his law, which includes certain commandments like, “Thou shall not kill” or “Thou shall not steal.” These are not arbitrary rules or a mere testing of obedience. God’s law flows from his love for us. He made us. He knows how we work. He knows that if we do certain things with our lives, we will thrive and be happy; and if we do other things with our lives, we will hurt ourselves and hurt others, disrupting the harmony he planned for us. And because he loves us, he reveals his plan for our happiness to guide us on the path of life: “Your Word, O Lord, is a lamp to my feet, a light to my path” (Psalm 118:105).

We can see this also in the two commands God gave Adam in Genesis 2. Consider them carefully. First, God commands Adam to till and keep the garden (Genesis 2:15). The original Hebrew word translated “keep” is *shamar*, which literally means “to guard.” The word is used in the Old Testament to describe priests guarding the holy

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tabernacle from intruders (Numbers 1:53; 3:7-8). Adam is, therefore, being told to guard the garden like a Levitical priest would guard the sanctuary.

Second, God warns Adam not to eat from a particular tree in the garden: “You may freely eat of every tree in the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die” (Genesis 2:16-17). According to these verses, why does God give Adam this command? Is it to control him or restrict him? No. Notice how God emphasizes the tremendous freedom he is giving Adam: “you may freely eat of every tree...” There’s only one tree that God warns against because he knows that if Adam eats of it, he will be harmed: “For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17). God gave this command to Adam because he loves him and doesn’t want him to be hurt.¹

In the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, God speaks these words to His people: “For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for woe, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11). God envisions a beautiful future, full of hope, for each one of us. And yet, we are often tempted to believe differently, to think that God doesn’t have a great plan for us, that he doesn’t care, that he doesn’t want what is best for us, or that his commands are not ordered toward our happiness.

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The first chapters of Genesis remind us of the goodness of God’s original plan. From the very beginning, he wanted us to share in his “blessed life” so that we could be happy in relationship with him forever. Unfortunately, this original plan was disrupted by the Fall, which we will discuss in the next chapter. That said, it is essential not to forget that, from the beginning, God had a good, loving plan for our lives.

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Additional Background

Image and Likeness (CCC 356-357)

Of all visible creatures only man is “able to know and love his creator”. He is “the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake”, and he alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God’s own life. It was for this end that he was created, and this is the fundamental reason for his dignity...

Being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. And he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead.

Original Holiness (CCC 374-375)

The first man was not only created good, but was also established in friendship with his Creator and in harmony with himself and with the creation around him, in a state that would be surpassed only by the glory of the new creation in Christ.

The Church, interpreting the symbolism of biblical language in an authentic way, in the light of the New Testament and Tradition, teaches that our first

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parents, Adam and Eve, were constituted in an original “state of holiness and justice”. This grace of original holiness was “to share in. . .divine life”.

Original Justice (CCC 376)

By the radiance of this grace all dimensions of man’s life were confirmed. As long as he remained in the divine intimacy, man would not have to suffer or die. The inner harmony of the human person, the harmony between man and woman, and finally the harmony between the first couple and all creation, comprised the state called “original justice”.

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DISCUSSION

Genesis 1:26
 Genesis 2:15-17
 Genesis 5:3
 Jeremiah 29:11

Discussion guide for your Bible study

Who Am I? What Am I Made For?

01. Launching Question (Optional):
 What is one thing we might not know about you that would help us understand who you are in a deeper way?
02. Launching Question:
 “Who am I? What am I made for? What is the purpose of life?” These are questions that humanity has been wrestling with for a long time. What are some of the best answers that you have heard to these questions?

Allow the group to discuss.

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Made for Relationship

Please read aloud:

These are some of the most important questions we face in life. And there’s one famous story in the Bible that points us in the right direction. You may have heard these passages before, perhaps even throughout your childhood, but the invitation in this Bible study is to look at these truths with new, mature eyes. Today we are going to look at the beginning of the Bible, the book of Genesis. Genesis means “beginnings.” Let’s begin our study by reading Genesis 1:26.

Read Genesis 1:26

03. What does this verse tell us about what humanity is made for? What does it mean to be made in the image and likeness of God?

Allow the group to discuss.

Note to the Leader: Don’t tell them the full answer just yet.

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Please read aloud:

As in any piece of literature, when you come across a word or expression that you're not sure what it means, you consider the context, to see how it's used in other settings. This will be important for interpreting the Bible correctly, too. So, if we want to understand the meaning of being made in God's image and likeness, we should consider the next time the expression is used. The next time the Bible uses the phrase "image and likeness" is Genesis 5:3. Let's see how the phrase is used there.

Read Genesis 5:3

04. What does this verse tell us about the phrase "image and likeness"? And what does this mean for us, when the Bible says that we are created in God's image and likeness (Genesis 1:26)?

Answer: Adam has a son named Seth, and Seth is in the image and likeness of his father Adam. In Scripture, therefore, the idea of image and likeness points to sonship. When Scripture states that we are created in the image and likeness of God, it is telling us that we are God's children, his sons and daughters.

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05. The Scriptures tell us that we are unlike anything else in all creation, that God made us to share in his life, to live in friendship with him as his children. At the same time, this can be a difficult reality to accept. Do you believe it is possible to have a deep, intimate relationship with God as His beloved child? Why or why not?

Allow the group to discuss.

God's Plan**Please read aloud:**

The Catechism of the Catholic Church picks up this same idea and describes God's great plan for us like this: "God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life" (CCC 1).

06. What does this tell us about what we are created for? How does this build on the idea that we are created in God's image and likeness?

Answer: God did not have any need to create us – he is perfectly blessed in himself. Yet, as the Bible teaches, "God is love" (1 John 4:8), and out of love, he freely chose to bring us into existence and fill us with his life, so that he could share his love with us. This is

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where we find enduring, lasting happiness: in friendship with God as his sons and daughters. We are God's children and he loves us. We did nothing to earn this love. It is freely given. We didn't have to exist. God, out of sheer love, freely chose to bring us into existence in order to share his love with us.

Please read aloud:

Not only did God create Adam and Eve in perfect, loving harmony with himself, he also created them in perfect harmony with each other, within themselves, and with the rest of creation.

07. What do you think it was like for Adam and Eve to live in this state of perfect harmony in relationship with God and each other?

Allow the group to discuss. For reference, see the additional background on "Original Holiness" and "Original Justice."

Please read aloud:

Let's turn back to the Scriptures and pick up the story in Genesis 2.

Read Genesis 2:15-17

08. What two commands does God give Adam?

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Answer: The first command God gives Adam in these verses is to till and keep the garden (Genesis 2:15). The original Hebrew word translated "keep" is shamar, which literally means "to guard." The word is used in the Old Testament to describe priests guarding the holy tabernacle from intruders (Numbers 1:53; 3:7-8). Adam is, therefore, being told to guard the garden like a Levitical priest would guard the sanctuary.

The second command God gives Adam is "You may freely eat of every tree in the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (Genesis 2:16-17).

09. According to these verses, why did God give this command to avoid eating from this one tree? Is he just trying to control or restrict Adam and Eve?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss. Notice how God emphasizes the tremendous freedom he is giving Adam: "you may freely eat of every tree..." There's only one tree that God warns against because he knows that if Adam eats of it, he will be harmed: "For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17). God gave this command to Adam because he loves him and doesn't want him to be hurt.

Please read aloud:

In the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, God speaks these words to His people: “For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for woe, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11). God envisions a beautiful future, full of hope, for each one of us. And yet, we are often tempted to believe differently, to think that God doesn’t have a great plan for us, that he doesn’t care, that he doesn’t want what is best for us, or that his commands are not ordered toward our happiness.

10. Why is it that we struggle to accept that God has a good plan for our lives? In what ways have you struggled to believe in God's plan for you?

Allow the group to discuss.

In the next chapter of this study, we will discuss the Fall and how humanity strayed from God's original plan. That said, it is essential not to forget that, from the beginning, God had a good, loving plan for our lives.

11. How does knowing that God has a plan for you affect the way you think about yourself and the way you should live?

Allow the group to discuss.

Notes

This image shows a full page of a notebook or ledger. It features a series of evenly spaced, horizontal blue lines running across the width of the page. The lines are thin and light blue, set against a plain white background. There are no margins, text, or other markings present.