

DAY 1

Unlike the Other Animals



Going to the zoo is a bit like taking a trip around the world. Lions from Africa, tigers from Asia, and snakes from all over—just to name a few of the creatures you'll find. The zoo is a great place to learn about animals and their behaviors. Perhaps you've seen an elephant, massive as it is, nimbly pick up the smallest piece of grass with its trunk. Or maybe you've exchanged glances with a Golden Tamarin as he hangs upside down by his tail. Then there's the feeding time for the seals. It is a marvel to watch these mammals cut through the water like fur-coated torpedoes, pop up on rocks, and gobble down whole fish.



But there are some things you won't see at the zoo. You won't see a zebra praying over his meal. You won't see the meerkats decorating their cages, and you certainly won't be able to have a conversation with a camel. Only one creature does these things, and it is you. We share a lot in common with other animals because we share the same environment, but we differ in some very significant ways. God tells us in Genesis 1:27 that He made man "in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." No other created thing was made in God's image, and it was only humans who walked with and learned from God in the Garden of Eden.

From beginning to end, the Bible teaches that God created us and wanted to know each of us in a personal and eternal way. John's Gospel tells us: "This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3). Here is the

fullness of God's plan in creating us in His image. He wanted us to know Him personally and relationally—in a way that no other creature ever could.

Though sin has marred the image of God in our lives, robbing us of the perfect fellowship humans were created to have with God the Father, Jesus' life, death, and resurrection restores that image and reunites us to God. Of all the things that we can remember about ourselves and others, nothing compares to being image-bearers, made to know and glorify God. When we view others through that lens, we begin seeing who they were always meant to be.

TO DWELL ON:

Each person is made to have a personal relationship with God.

TO DISCUSS:

1. How are human beings different from other animals?
2. How would remembering other people were created for a relationship with God change the way you treat them?

TO MEMORIZE:

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:16



DAY 2

Blinded Minds

A common story line in movies and books is that of a person we're supposed to think is a good guy who turns out to be a villain. He pretends to care for those around him and usually helps them out of a tight spot, all the while planning evil things. There is always someone who suspects that he is not who he says he is, and it is that person's job to help others see it.

This is a common plot because it is every person's story. At the very beginning of our story of origin, Adam and Eve were deceived by the serpent (Satan). He assured them that they would not die by disobeying God's command. Instead, he promised that they would benefit by becoming *like* God. Satan deceived Adam and Eve into caring more about their own image and ideas than God's. Satan uses that same lie today. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4:

Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

If a person is without Christ, he is walking in darkness. He is an image-bearing soul that is blind to his true condition. He may not be a villain. He may be a "good person" by everyone's estimation.

But if he doesn't trust in Jesus to forgive him of his sins, he is walking in blindness to God and is lost in his waywardness. People are easily duped by appearances, and we—as followers of Christ—can sometimes find ourselves tricked into believing with our eyes rather than according to the truth of God's Word. Jesus calls us to be His witnesses so that we can shine the light of the gospel to those around us. Don't be discouraged when you see people seemingly blinded by the enemy's schemes or unaware of their true need for Christ. Don't give up on them—instead, see them as God sees them: people created by God who need to be brought into the light.

TO DWELL ON:

Be the light to others who may not yet see their need for Christ.

TO DISCUSS:

1. How are some of your friends blinded into caring more about their own image than being image-bearers of God?
2. Who are some people in your life you can be a light to?

TO MEMORIZE:

In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:4

DAY 3

Everyone Is Creative



When we think of creativity, we think of paints and brushes, yarn, fabric, and sewing machines. We think of dancers and musicians, woodworkers and metalsmiths. We say things such as, “I’m not very creative” if we don’t think we fall into one of these categories or if we’ve thrown unsuccessful art and DIY projects into the trash.

But in reality, everyone is creative. *Everyone!* While not everyone enjoys scrapbooking, sculpting, or painting, every person has a God-given nature to create and express creativity. That’s how we were made because that’s who we reflect: “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27).

God formed and made us to reflect and resonate His glory and His handiwork. We had nothing to do with His formation of the earth or the greatness of His design:

As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother’s womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things (Ecclesiastes 11:5 NIV).

These reminders from Scripture (and so many more from the book of Job) make clear that God is God and we are not. The most creative,

talented, or artistic person on earth has nothing on God who breathed life into man and formed him from dust. We are His divine workmanship.

Knowing this should change the way we think of ourselves and others. Rather than measure or label ourselves or others as talented, creative, not creative, or nonartistic, we can simply remember that the God who formed every person is the God who breathed infinite imagination, unique thought, and creative expression into you and me. Some use words, some use tools, some create from flour and butter. God has given each of us minds that develop ideas and creations only we can uniquely form.

TO DWELL ON:

Every person is a creative being because each person reflects a creative God.

TO DISCUSS:

1. Do you feel like a creative person? Why or why not?
2. In what way can you reflect God’s creativity by being the person He’s made you to be?

TO MEMORIZE:

God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

GENESIS 1:27



DAY 4

As One

Take one look at an eagle, and it's obvious it was created for flight. Anyone can recognize that a cheetah was built to run. Fish swim, monkeys swing, frogs jump, and no one is surprised because we know the connection between a creature's physical traits and the purpose of its design. No two creatures are alike, just as no two people are created the same.

Curly hair, straight hair, dark skin, freckled skin, long-legged, wheel-chaired, green-eyed, or physically blind...every man and woman God created is unique. God also gave us unique stories, backgrounds, and places to call home. Across the globe, people speak different languages and have different cultures, family traditions, and dress. A most beautiful hat to wear in one culture can seem strange in another. What tastes delicious to a family in one country would never make it to the table on the other side of the globe. The Bible tells us that, though people on the earth may look, sound, or enjoy different things from one another, they will someday be together as one if they love God:

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands (Revelation 7:9 NIV).

The beauty of God's design is that regardless of background, physical traits, language, skin color, or country of origin, each one of us bears the image of God! Doesn't that tell you something of God's creativity, heart, and purpose? God Himself does not look or sound just like one kind of people on earth. He made all of us to reflect Him.

When you meet someone who is different from you in looks, heritage, language, or physical strengths, remember that he or she may one day be a brother or sister with whom you spend all of eternity worshipping.

TO DWELL ON:

Every language, race, color, physical trait, and ethnicity will be represented in heaven.

TO DISCUSS:

1. Do you have friends from other countries? Describe the most interesting thing about their culture.
2. How does knowing you may worship in heaven next to someone completely different from you change how you treat him or her today?

TO MEMORIZE:

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.

REVELATION 7:9 (NIV)

DAY 5

We Are His

Everyone tells you to be yourself.

Unfortunately, “yourself” is not always an easy thing to discern, especially in today’s identity obsessed world. When asked, “Who are you?” you may be tempted to describe what you do, where you live, or what you are good at. Parents, you might think of yourself according to your job title or school degree. Kids, you might say “a soccer player” or “a swimmer.” One look at social media, and you can see how obsessed we as a culture are over the issue of identity—who our friends are, what organizations we support, what pages we “like,” who we know, how we look to others. Our online life becomes our identity in an age where people barely know one another face-to-face.

How do you really know exactly who you are?

It’s hard to be yourself if the self you are representing is a carefully managed picture you want others to see. We weren’t made to represent our “self” for our own benefit; we were made by God and for Him. As we’re told in Ephesians, “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

We are not our own. We are not the sum of our reputations, our social media pages, or what others think of us. We’ve been bought with a price and no longer represent ourselves, but God. As followers of Jesus, we’re representatives of the work of Jesus Christ to bless

others with the fruit of salvation. We were made by Him and for Him!

When we discover that our identity is in what our Savior has already done and not in what we strive to do for ourselves, the answer to the “Who am I?” question is so much easier. It’s okay to be no one to everyone if you are someone to the Holy One. Being yourself is not as important as being His.

TO DWELL ON:

Our true identity is found in Jesus.

TO DISCUSS:

1. How do you typically introduce yourself when meeting someone new? How do you describe who you are?
2. What has Jesus done to make you His? How should that change your sense of identity?

TO MEMORIZE:

We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus
for good works, which God prepared beforehand,
that we should walk in them.

EPHESIANS 2:10