

Rooted: Core Truths, Teacher's Guide

Week 2: What It Means to Be Human

Genesis 1:26–27; Psalm 8

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This week establishes a foundational truth that the rest of Scripture assumes: the nature and God-given dignity of the human person. Genesis 1:26–27 teaches that human beings, alone among all creatures, are made in the image and likeness of God, created male and female, and given dominion over the earth. Psalm 8 takes up the same theme in worship, holding together our smallness before the Creator and the “glory and honor” with which He has crowned us. A great deal is at stake doctrinally here. The image of God is the basis for the worth of every human life, for the equal dignity of men and women, for our calling to steward creation, and for the very meaning of being human. The teacher should be ready to set this truth against the two great errors of our age: the reductionism that treats people as mere animals or cosmic accidents with no fixed worth, and the self-deifying pride that says each person may define his own reality. Scripture says we are neither accidents nor gods. We are creatures, made on purpose, bearing the image of the One who made us.

Yet this doctrine is intensely personal and formative. How a person answers the question “what is a human being?” shapes how they see themselves, how they treat others, and how they understand their place before God. Many believers carry a quiet sense of worthlessness, measuring themselves by performance or appearance, and the truth that they bear God’s image speaks directly to that wound. Others struggle with pride or with contempt for certain people, and the same truth confronts them. The teacher’s aim is to let this doctrine do its forming work: to ground students’ worth in God rather than in achievement, to teach them to see the image of God in every person they meet, and to call them to the humble dignity of a creature who knows both that he is dust and that he is loved by his Maker.

So aim at both targets. Send students home understanding clearly what the image of God means and why it matters, able to defend the dignity of human life and the worth of every person. And send them home seeing themselves and their neighbors differently, more secure in God’s love, more humble before Him, and more honoring of the people around them. Above all, point them to Jesus, the true image of God and the true human, into whose likeness God is patiently remaking everyone who belongs to Him.

Question 1

Student Question:

When God makes humanity, He says, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1:26). What does it mean to be made in the image of God, and how does this set human beings apart from the rest of creation?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the striking change in the creation account itself. Through the first chapter of Genesis, God simply speaks and things come to be: “let there be light,” “let the earth bring forth.” But when He comes to make humanity, the language shifts to deliberation and intimacy: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” Something different is happening here. The human being is not just one more item in the catalog of creation; we are its summit, made with care and counsel, the only creature said to bear God’s image.

Help students grasp what “image” means. In the ancient world, a king would set up an image or statue of himself in distant parts of his realm to represent his rule where he could not be in person. To be made in God’s image is to be His representative on earth, made to reflect Him and to act for Him in the world. This includes the capacities that set us apart from the animals: reason, moral conscience, the ability to know and love God, creativity, and the calling to rule. We are made to mirror our Maker.

Note the plural, “let us make.” The teacher need not overload the class, but can point out that Scripture later reveals the one God as Father, Son, and Spirit, and this early plural quietly anticipates that fullness. The God who exists eternally in relationship makes a creature capable of relationship, with Him and with one another.

Finally, press the foundational point that anchors the whole lesson. Human dignity does not rest on what a person can do, how they look, how old or able they are, or what others think of them. It rests on the unchangeable fact that they are made in the image of God. This is why every human life, from the unborn to the elderly, from the powerful to the forgotten, carries a worth that no one assigned and no one can revoke.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The image of God as the unique mark of humanity among all creatures
- The image understood as representation: humans made to reflect and represent God
- The capacities that flow from the image (reason, conscience, relationship, creativity, rule)
- The plural “let us make” and the fullness of the one God
- Human worth grounded in the image of God, not in ability, appearance, or achievement

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean, practically, to be God’s representative on earth?
- Why does grounding human worth in the image of God matter so much in debates about human life?

- How would your week look different if you truly believed you were made to reflect God?

Question 2

Student Question:

Most of us, in practice, measure our worth by something we can lose: looks, achievement, usefulness, the opinions of others. In what specific area are you trying to earn a sense of value that God has already given you simply because you bear His image? What would change if you truly believed your worth was settled before you did anything?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first self-examining question, and the goal is honesty rather than information. Almost everyone in the room is quietly running on a worth-economy of some kind, trying to earn a sense of value they were actually given for free. The trouble is that every earned worth is also a losable worth. If my value comes from my looks, my career, my usefulness, or the approval of others, then it can be taken from me the moment those things change.

Help students name their particular currency gently. For one person it is achievement and being impressive; for another it is being needed; for another, beauty or youth; for another, the steady approval of a parent, a spouse, or a crowd. None of these is evil in itself, but none can bear the weight of our identity. When we build our worth on them, we live anxious and exhausted, always one failure away from feeling worthless.

Then turn to the good news of the passage. The image of God is given, not earned, and it cannot be lost. A student does not have to perform to be valuable; they already are, by the decree of their Maker. The invitation is to let that settled truth begin to replace the fragile worth they have been chasing. Press for one concrete area where a student will start resting in given worth this week rather than scrambling to earn it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between worth that is earned (and losable) and worth that is given
- Common substitute sources of identity (achievement, appearance, approval, usefulness)
- The exhaustion and anxiety of trying to earn what God has already given
- Resting in God-given worth as a daily, practical discipline

Discussion Prompts

- What is the main currency you use to measure your own worth?
- What happens to you emotionally when that source is threatened?
- Where do you most need to rest in given worth rather than earned worth this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Genesis says, “male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27), and both are made in God’s image. What does this teach about the equal dignity and worth of men and women, and how should that shape the way we regard and treat one another?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Genesis 1:27 states it plainly and beautifully: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created him.” Both men and women bear the image of God fully and equally. Neither sex is more in the image of God than the other, and neither is an afterthought. This was a remarkable claim in the ancient world, and it remains a vital one. The worth and dignity of women and men stand on exactly the same ground.

The teacher should let the equal dignity of the sexes carry its full weight, because it has enormous practical consequences. It means contempt for women, or for men, is contempt for an image-bearer of God. It means no person may be treated as less than fully human on the basis of their sex. It dignifies both the man and the woman as God’s representatives, called together to reflect Him and to fill and steward the earth.

It is worth noting, briefly and without turning this question into a different lesson, that equal worth and dignity do not erase the distinct and complementary roles God assigns to men and women, which Scripture develops elsewhere. The point here in Genesis 1 is the shared dignity of both as image-bearers. Equality of worth and difference of role are both biblical, and they are not in conflict. Keep the focus this week on the dignity the two share, and let it reshape how students honor one another.

Bring it home to the room. Encourage students to consider whether they truly regard the men and women in their lives, in their homes, at work, and in the church, as equal bearers of God’s image, worthy of honor and not contempt. The doctrine is not abstract; it shows up in how we speak to and about one another.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Men and women created equally and fully in the image of God
- The equal worth and dignity of the sexes as a foundational biblical truth
- Equal dignity alongside the distinct, complementary roles Scripture assigns (developed elsewhere)
- Contempt or mistreatment of any person as an offense against God’s image

Discussion Prompts

- Why does it matter that both male and female bear God’s image equally?
- How does this truth confront the ways our culture devalues people?

- Where do you need to grow in honoring the men and women in your own life as image-bearers?

Question 4

Student Question:

James writes that with the same tongue “we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God” (James 3:9). Think of a person or group you have quietly held in contempt, dismissed, or spoken about with disdain. How does remembering they bear God’s image change the way you are called to treat them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the truth of the image outward, toward the people we are tempted to treat as less than image-bearers. James puts his finger on the inconsistency exactly: with the same tongue “we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God” (James 3:9). It is a strange and sobering thing that we can praise God in one breath and tear down His image-bearers in the next.

Help students get specific without shaming anyone. Contempt rarely announces itself. It hides in the way we talk about a political opponent, a difficult relative, a coworker we look down on, a group we have written off, or the driver who cut us off. We reduce people to a category or a caricature and quietly decide they do not deserve our respect. The doctrine of the image will not allow it. Every person we are tempted to dismiss is someone God made to bear His likeness.

Move toward one concrete relationship. Ask students to name a person or group they have held in contempt and to consider what changes when they picture that person as an image-bearer of God, loved by Him. Often it begins with our speech, refusing to join the easy mockery, choosing words that honor rather than diminish. Invite one specific step toward treating a particular person this week as the image-bearer they are.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The image of God as the basis for honoring every person
- The inconsistency of praising God while degrading those made in His likeness (James 3:9)
- Contempt as it hides in speech, attitudes, and categories
- Honoring image-bearers we are naturally inclined to dismiss

Discussion Prompts

- Who are the people or groups you are most tempted to hold in contempt?
- How does seeing them as image-bearers of God change what you owe them?
- What is one specific way you can honor such a person, in word or deed, this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

God tells humanity to “have dominion” over the earth and to “subdue it” (Genesis 1:26, 28). What kind of rule does God intend us to exercise over the world He made, and how is godly stewardship different from selfish exploitation?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

After making humanity in His image, God gives a commission: “have dominion” over the creatures, and “fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:26, 28). This is sometimes misread as permission to exploit and abuse the world. Read in context, it is the opposite. We rule as God’s representatives, and we are meant to rule the way He would, with wisdom, care, and the good of what we govern in view. The God who called creation “very good” did not hand it over to be ruined.

Help students see that this gives human work and responsibility real dignity. To cultivate a garden, run a business, raise a family, govern a city, create something beautiful, or care for animals and land is to carry out, in a small way, the image-bearing vocation God gave at the beginning. We were made to be productive stewards, not idle consumers. Work is not a curse; the curse came later and made work hard, but work itself is part of our God-given calling.

Draw the line clearly between stewardship and exploitation. A steward manages what belongs to another and will give an account for it. That changes everything. The earth, our possessions, our influence, and our abilities are entrusted to us by God, not owned outright by us. Godly dominion uses these things for God’s purposes and for the good of others; selfish exploitation uses them up for ourselves. The teacher can help students feel the weight and the privilege of being trusted with a corner of God’s world.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Dominion as representative rule under God, not license to exploit
- The God-given dignity of human work and responsibility
- Stewardship as managing what belongs to another, with accountability
- The difference between faithful stewardship and selfish exploitation

Discussion Prompts

- What does it look like to rule a part of God’s world the way He would?
- How does seeing your daily work as image-bearing change the way you do it?
- Where is the line, in your own life, between stewardship and simply using things up for yourself?

Question 6

Student Question:

Every one of us has been given a sphere to steward: work, money, a body, a home, relationships, a corner of God's creation. Where have you been treating what God entrusted to you carelessly, or as if it were simply yours to use as you please? What would faithful stewardship look like in that area this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses the truth of dominion into the student's own life. Every person has been entrusted with a sphere, whether large or small: a job, a household, money, a body, relationships, a piece of God's creation, a set of gifts. The question is not whether we are stewards, but whether we are faithful ones.

Help students locate the area where stewardship has slipped. For one it may be a body neglected or abused; for another, money spent thoughtlessly or hoarded anxiously; for another, a home or relationships treated carelessly; for another, time and talent left buried rather than used. The tone here should be invitational, not guilt-inducing. The point is to recover the dignity of stewardship, not to pile on shame.

Move toward one concrete step. Faithful stewardship usually begins with a single, specific change: a budget, a healthier rhythm, time given to a neglected relationship, a gift finally put to use in service. Ask each student to name one area God has entrusted to them and one way they will steward it more faithfully this week, remembering that they manage it for Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Every believer as a steward of an entrusted sphere
- Common areas of neglected stewardship (body, money, time, relationships, gifts)
- Stewardship recovered as dignity and calling, not merely duty
- Faithfulness with what we have been given, large or small

Discussion Prompts

- What has God entrusted to you that you have been stewarding carelessly?
- What would faithful stewardship look like in that area, concretely?
- How does remembering you manage it for God change the way you handle it?

Question 7**Student Question:**

David marvels, "when I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him?" (Psalm 8:3–4), and yet he

says God has “crowned him with glory and honor” (v. 5). How does this passage hold together both our smallness before God and the astonishing dignity He has given us?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Psalm 8 is a song of wonder, and it holds two truths together that we usually keep apart. David looks up at “the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars,” and feels the proper smallness of a creature before the vastness of what God has made: “what is man that you are mindful of him?” There is real humility here. Set against the cosmos, a human life is brief and tiny, and the wonder is not that God would ignore us but that He pays us any attention at all.

And yet, in the same breath, David sings of staggering dignity. God has made humanity “a little lower than the heavenly beings” and “crowned him with glory and honor,” giving him rule over the works of God’s hands. The teacher should help students feel both notes at once. We are small, dependent creatures, and we are crowned image-bearers entrusted with God’s world. Neither truth cancels the other.

This combination is exactly what guards us from the two errors named earlier. Smallness without dignity leads to despair, the sense that we do not matter at all. Dignity without smallness leads to pride, the sense that we are the center of everything. Psalm 8 refuses both. The humble creature is also the crowned representative, and the proper response to both is worship, which is just where the psalm begins and ends: “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.”

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The proper smallness of the creature before the Creator
- The astonishing dignity of being crowned with glory and honor
- Holding humility and dignity together rather than choosing one
- Worship as the right response to both our smallness and our dignity

Discussion Prompts

- When has the vastness of creation made you feel small, and what did you do with that feeling?
- How can holding both our smallness and our dignity guard us from despair and from pride?
- Why does Psalm 8 begin and end with the praise of God’s name?

Question 8

Student Question:

It is possible to err in two directions: to think too highly of ourselves, forgetting we are creatures who depend on God for our next breath, or to think too little of ourselves, despising the dignity

He has given. Which direction do you tend to drift, and how would a true view of yourself, humble and dignified at the same time, change the way you carry yourself this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question invites honest self-knowledge about which way we tend to drift. Some of us lean toward pride: we forget we are creatures, live as though we are self-sufficient, resent our limits, and quietly try to run our lives and the lives of others as if we were God. Others lean toward self-contempt: we despise the dignity God gave us, talk to ourselves in ways we would never talk to anyone else, and live as though we are worthless. Both are distortions of the truth Psalm 8 sings.

Help students recognize their own drift. The proud person needs to recover the humility of the creature: I depend on God for my next breath, my life is a vapor, and I am not the center of the universe. The self-despising person needs to recover the dignity of the image-bearer: I am crowned with glory and honor, loved and valued by my Maker, and I have no right to despise what He has dignified. The same psalm speaks to both.

Move toward one concrete change. For the proud, it may mean a deliberate act of dependence: prayer, submission, admitting a limit, asking for help. For the self-despising, it may mean refusing the inner voice of contempt and speaking the truth of the image over themselves. Ask each student to name their drift and one step toward the humble dignity that is the truth about them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Pride as forgetting we are dependent creatures
- Self-contempt as despising the dignity God has given
- Humble dignity as the true and balanced self-understanding
- Practical steps toward dependence (for the proud) and toward honoring God's image in oneself (for the self-despising)

Discussion Prompts

- Which do you drift toward more easily, pride or self-contempt?
- What does healthy dependence on God look like for you in daily life?
- How can you speak the truth of your God-given dignity over yourself this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Hebrews takes the words of Psalm 8 and applies them to Jesus, saying that though we do not yet see everything in subjection to humanity, "we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor" (Hebrews 2:9). How is Jesus the

true human who fulfills what God intended for us, and what does it mean that God is now remaking us into His image (Colossians 3:9–10; Romans 8:29)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the most doctrinally significant question of the lesson, and it lifts the whole theme of human dignity to its highest point. The writer of Hebrews quotes Psalm 8, the very psalm we have been studying, and then makes a remarkable move. He admits that, at present, “we do not yet see everything in subjection to him,” that is, we do not yet see humanity exercising the full, unbroken dominion God intended. Sin has marred the picture. But then he says, “we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor” (Hebrews 2:9). What was said of humanity in Psalm 8 is fulfilled first and fully in Jesus.

Help students see Jesus as the true human. The image of God in us, though never erased, has been defaced by sin, a truth this study will take up directly next week. We do not see in ourselves the perfect image-bearer God intended. But we do see Him in Christ. Scripture calls Jesus “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15) and “the image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:4). He is what a human being was always meant to be: perfectly reflecting the Father, perfectly obedient, ruling and serving as God intended. When we want to know what true humanity looks like, we look at Jesus.

Then comes the hope that crowns the lesson. God is not content to leave His image defaced in us. He is remaking us, and the pattern He is conforming us to is Christ. Believers are being “renewed in knowledge after the image of (their) creator” (Colossians 3:10), and God’s purpose is that we “be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29). The image we were made to bear is being restored in us as we are joined to Jesus and shaped into His likeness, “from one degree of glory to another” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Be careful to keep this in the right frame for our students. This restoration is not automatic or merely internal; it belongs to those who are in Christ, joined to Him and walking with Him, and it is the work of a lifetime. The teacher should connect it to the larger gospel the study is unfolding: we are made in God’s image, that image is broken by sin, it is perfectly displayed in Christ, and it is restored in those who come to Him and are being formed by Him. Human dignity is not finally found by looking inward at ourselves, but by looking at Jesus and being remade in His likeness.

Bring it home with hope. Whatever a student sees in the mirror, however marred or ordinary, the destiny of those in Christ is to be fully and finally remade into the image of the Son. The crowned humanity of Psalm 8, lost to us through sin, is secured in Jesus and shared with all who belong to Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Psalm 8 fulfilled first and fully in Jesus (Hebrews 2:6–9)

- Christ as the true human and the perfect image of God (Colossians 1:15; 2 Corinthians 4:4)
- The image of God in us marred by sin yet not erased
- Believers being remade into the image of Christ (Romans 8:29; Colossians 3:10; 2 Corinthians 3:18)
- The restoration of the image as the work of God in those who are in Christ
- True humanity found by looking to Jesus, not inward at ourselves

Discussion Prompts

- How is Jesus the true human that Psalm 8 points toward?
- What does it mean that God is remaking you into the image of His Son?
- How does looking to Christ, rather than inward, change the way you understand who you are?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across both passages. God made you in His image, crowned you with glory and honor, gave you a world to steward, and is now reshaping you into the likeness of His Son. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth about what it means to be human that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question asks students to gather the whole of both passages and name one specific way Christ is forming them. Resist letting answers stay at the level of “I should value myself more.” Press gently for the concrete: value yourself how, see whom differently, change what this week.

It helps to retrace the movement. God made you in His image, with a dignity you did not earn and cannot lose. He created male and female as equal image-bearers. He gave humanity a world to steward. David sang of our smallness and our crown together. And Jesus, the true human, is the One into whose image God is now remaking everyone who belongs to Him. Invite each student to ask which of these truths their heart most needs to grab hold of this week.

Close by reminding students that the goal is transformation, not merely information. To know what it means to be human, in the biblical sense, should change how we treat ourselves, how we treat others, and how we walk before God. Encourage each one to leave with a single truth to carry, return to, and pray over until the next gathering.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Scripture aimed at transformation, not merely information
- A settled, God-given sense of worth and identity

- Seeing every person, including oneself, as an image-bearer of God
- Being formed into the image of Christ as a daily reality

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth about being human does your heart most need this week, and why?
- What would it look like, concretely, to live in light of that truth?
- How can this group pray for and encourage you in that one step?