

FTBC

GROWTH TRACKS

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Welcome to Growth Tracks which is FBC's program designed to set the disciple on the firm foundation spiritual maturity.

*In 2 Corinthians 4:6 (ESV) Paul writes "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ".*

The key to growth in our spiritual lives is encountering the glory of God through the person of His Son who is His perfect image. The more our hearts are filled with the knowledge of Him the more our characters are moulded, the more our hearts are filled with His love and more our lives will be directed towards the purpose for which we were created....to glorify Him. Each chapter is designed to provide a progressive track to show the face of Christ through selected but key passages in the Bible laying down the bed rock foundations of faith that will form the basis for a life -long learning and growing in to the likeness of Christ. Prayerfully follow these chapters and His Spirit will propel you into a trajectory of robust growth and spiritual transformation. Learn how to read the bible by tackling whole passages of Scripture rather than piece meal verses. See how principles from the passages will be translated to everyday life. For those disciples going into the Gamma program these presentations will help bridge the gap between the Alpha Beta programs and the more in- depth Gamma discipleship program.

For those who prefer to listen and see the contents of this book you can go to our website at [www.fbc.com .my](http://www.fbc.com.my) and each chapter will be presented in a series of slides at the resources section of our site under the title "Growth Tracks"



# MODULE 1



**IT ALL BEGINS WITH GOD**

## Introduction:

It is vital that we start any study of the Christian faith with the topic of God. It is the shift of focus from God to man that underpins much of the popular misconceptions of faith in the world today. Whether it be gay marriage to abortion or any norms of human history if the focus has shifted from God to man we will get a distortion of the original intent of creation. Hence any attempt to go back to the original design and purpose of life necessarily has to be start at the beginning and in the very beginning there was only God!

Take away the God perspective and it is a man-centered world today when there are seven billion men and women living in the world, each being the center of their own universe, chaos will inevitably reign and sin is supreme. Now the gospel brings us back from the brink of eternal death where man is spinning out of control but God is where we must start our inquiry, God is where it all begins. So in this study we will be looking at the Book of Genesis Chapter 1, the first book written in the bible telling us about God and how it is God's world which God created in God's time for God's purposes putting it all in perspective.

## God In The Beginning:

Let's start off with the first of the 66 books in the Bible. Genesis is the first book of the Bible and it was written to provide a framework by which we can view the world and our place in it. So we start off with Genesis Chapter 1:1-2. When we look at the verse one immediately we see the first phrase,

*Genesis 1:1-2 (ESV) In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*

“**In the beginning**”...., the author of genesis says that there was a beginning for our world and our universe. Now this is in complete opposition to what some philosopher say, when they say the universe has always been eternal, has always been there. Genesis 1 tells us that the universe was never eternal. There was as beginning and in the beginning was God. In fact, scientist have long known this.

Scientist like Stephen Hawking established the Big Bang Theory years ago. Since then it has been scientific consensus that there was a beginning where everything started. The Bible tells that yes there was a beginning but that beginning was caused by God.

We read on

*Genesis 1:1-2 (ESV) In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*

This is where the biblical view differs from the view of scientists and necessarily so simply because science can only investigate the physical mechanisms and physical laws that govern the universe that are observable. Science can confirm as does philosophy that everything that exists has a cause. Science confirms the presence of matter and energy but if we were to extrapolate backwards to the first cause of all things at the beginning that cause must be necessarily all powerful and cannot be made of matter itself and would be space-less, timeless and separate or transcendent from the universe. The bible calls this first cause God hence it is not illogical nor absurd as philosophers will point out that it is even more absurd to say that the universe is eternal. Everything has a cause but they don't really want to call that cause “God”.

The bible simply states that this first cause if God and the rest of the bible is revelation from this God to us. We view God as transcendent, which means he is above, he is separate from the entire universe. The universe, the world, the stars and all of us, is part of the created order. God is separate from this, he is not part of this, he is above this, he has created this.

There are alternative religious views on the nature of God and one view is the pantheistic view of God where God is made to be part of the universe, God is part in parcel of the universe. Look at what one author who opines God is not a concept, or a theory, or a particle. God is everything.”

This is an example of a pantheistic view of God because God is part of everything. Here is another example of a pantheistic view of God.

*“Nature is my religion. The earth is my temple.”*

These pantheistic view of religion are very common. The popular Star Wars movie is based on pantheistic view of God, where God is the unseen force of the universe and we can harness this force for our own purposes, whether for good or for evil.

The bible will have none of this it clearly states that God created the heavens and the earth. Not only is God separate or transcendent, he is the creator of the whole universe. The words, ‘heaven and earth’ are opposites in Hebrew language called “merisms” are used to encompass everything.

## **Design & Purpose in Creation:**

Let’s now continue to read a portion of scripture from verses 3-13 to get an idea of how God created this universe,

*Genesis 1:3-13 (ESV) And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.6 And God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” 7 And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. 8 And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day. 9 And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. 10 God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. 11 And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so. 12 The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 13 And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.*

One of the most important skills that need to be acquired in reading the bible as in reading any ancient literature is to look out for patterns. In this passage you can immediately recognize, patterns based on repetitions. You can also find that the creation is organized into periods called, ‘days’. If you look in verse 4, after God has separated light from the darkness, there is a quotation saying that there was evening and morning for the first day. The pattern is repeated throughout the entire creation narrative.

*8 And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.  
13 And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.*

So the noticeable repetitions have shown that creation process was organized into days.

This is the proof in these recurring phrases. However, the million dollar question which is the bottom of most controversies over the creation account is that could these be literal 24 hour period days? A quick scan of the passage would immediately bring to our attention that this could not be logically read as literal days because the sun and the moon were created on the fourth day whereas on the first day there was already a mention of the first day in verse 4. Look at this....

*Genesis 1:16-18 (ESV) And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. 17 And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, 18 to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness*

Here we have a description of the creation of the sun and the moon which is on the fourth day.

Immediate controversy with this creation of the world divided into days is interpretation of the word 'day'. For those who take this to be a 24-hour day then this would actually make age of the earth very young. Bishop Ussher calculated this to be about 6000 years, which is totally wrong if one looks at the scientific evidence of the actual date of the earth. We believe because this is not a literal 24-hour day but it is an indeterminate period of time or what we call it analogical day. It is like calling your son down for dinner, "come down son for dinner". Your son might be playing his computer game and he will tell you, "In a minute Mom". Now his minute could be anywhere between 5 minutes to 2 hours, depending on how engrossed in the game he is. So therefore this is an example of an analogical day. The Bible doesn't tell us precisely what this period is, but it gives us enough room to understand that this is an indeterminate period of time.

Biblical critics will immediately pounce on this and say that the bible is totally inconsistent and unreliable as it cannot even get the concept of "Day" straight as it totally contradicts itself on the first page. However, if one is familiar with ancient literature one will not unreasonably recognize that this is a case of Hebrew poetry where the phrase "And there was evening and there was morning, the third day" is used to frame the contents in each creative period. The book of Genesis was written by Moses years after the creation of the world and the entire creation was cast according to the ancient work week with which the Hebrews were entirely familiar with as they worked for 6 days and rested on the 7th. Hence it is not unreasonable to take the concept of "Day" as an analogical concept.

As in any other poetry there are also other noticeable repetitions, God creates by his word in a sense that he merely speaks it out and it comes to pass and he creates it out of nothing.

*Gen 1:3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light*

*Gen 1: 9 And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so*

So everything is created by the power of His word. This is creation out of nothing and we use the theological term creation "ex nihilo". Everybody else creates using base material like a potter will use clay to create a pot as cook would use flour to make noodles but God is the only one who creates out of nothing. The other thing to note is that He creates by His mere word. We can say let there be light but someone has to run to get the switch and turn it on whilst God's mere thoughts and word do the creation. All this paints a picture of a sovereign immensely powerful God.

Words convey the intent of the mind and Genesis shows that creation was born out of God's desire, intent and design. What He desired He spoke in to existence. In creation He also named every facet of creation look in "5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night" which means He gave every part of creation a specific design, purpose and function. Naming is a divine sovereign prerogative.

After every creation God ever did this phrase would be repeated, "**And God saw that it was good**", it was up to God's expectations. The fact that it was always good means that creation was according to God's specific purpose and design. It accomplished His desires for it.

This is important. Everything that is in our universe and our world that we live in, when it was created by God originally was good, because the author is telling us that although we live in a world where there is obvious evil, pain and ugliness in the midst of untold beauty that the original creation was actually good and that is until something else not good actually happened.

One should also notice that there is a progressive pattern of creation, you look at from Day 1 to Day 7:

Day 1 – light is created.

Day 2 – sky is separated from the waters

Day 3 – vegetation is provided

Day 4 – the sun, moon and star are out

Day 5 – flying creatures and sea creatures are provided

Day 6 – man, mammals, reptiles and insects

Day 7 – rest to enjoy creation

So creation conforms to a design and purpose as the earth is first fashioned to facilitate the creatures that live within the earth. This creation is also cast as a 7-day week cycle which is the manner in which most ancient people could understand as it was the standard work 'week'

**Let us now recap what we know about our universe which is implied in the passage we have just studied  
We live in a world created by God and for God.**

1. The universe did not create itself, it was never eternal on its own
2. There is careful design and purpose in its creation it is not an illusion
3. The universe was created to glorify God and revolve around God not us.
4. The world is a wonderful place, creation is good and to be enjoyed because it is provided for by God.

We also learned several things about God in Genesis Chapter 1. We learn that

1. God is transcendent, which is separate from creation.
2. He is all powerful and sovereign that is all things come into being because of His will.
3. He is a speaking God.
4. He is a good God.

The presence of God is important because

- He provides purpose and with it, significance of why the world matters
- He gives meaning, which is a goal or reason for the existence of creatures in it.
- It provides value, good or evil, right or wrong. It is determined by God's will

## The Design & Purpose of Man

Now comes the most important few verses in this entire chapter. It has to do with where we come into the scheme of things

*Genesis 1:26-27 (ESV) 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 heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

The most important difference between man and the rest of creation is that, only man bears the unique image of God himself. The fact that man is created in the 6th day of creation after everything else in the world has been prepared for him indicates that this is the climax of God's creation. God has not given His image to any animal or any plant or anything else that is created. It is we alone who actually have the unique characteristic of being made in His image and it is precisely this that gives us value, significance and purpose. You will also note that the image of God comprises of both male and female. It is not male alone. It is male and female, both are valued, both express who God is.

For the rest of the study, we will just concentrate on exploring the image of God and when we talk about the image of God, we would like to explore it in terms of what it means for us in terms of our purpose which is related to our design.

- we are made to relate to God
- we are made to resemble God
- we are also made to represent God.

## Relating to God

As humans, we are uniquely able to communicate. We can think. We have the ability to process the past, the present and project into the future, things which animals cannot do. We are capable of love and relationships.

Humans relate to each other and the closest relationship is marriage. The extension of the human couple is the family and the basis of relationship is love. Our human relationships point us towards our own relationship to God. The ultimate relationship for which we were created therefore is to relate to God because we were created in His image in His likeness

### How do we relate to God?

The way we relate to anyone is based on who the person is. The way we relate to our spouse is different to the way we relate to our children. Since God is all glorious, all powerful and the person to whom we owe our whole existence and purpose, the right way to relate to him is to love and worship him.

Here is a quotation from the Westminster Confession of Faith, which is old the Anglican confession which summarizes this function as, **'The man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever'**.



## Resembling God:

The second function is resembling him. Son resemble their fathers both in looks, character and personality. We are born with all the characteristics and capabilities of our parents in some measure.

It is because we have been created in His image that we have been endowed with all His capability for love, commitment, intelligence and ability to relate and so we could resemble Him in action and this is a function of our own will. We can choose to be like Him or not to be like Him. Like any child can choose to follow in the footsteps of his father or he can stray off this path. We are given free will to act like God, to resemble Him or to act in a manner which is unlike Him.

The two tablets that comprise the Ten Commandments were given to Israel after God had saved the people of Israel from Egypt and made them His own chosen people. He gave them the 10 commandments which basically outlined in character how we the people of God should act to resemble their savior God in all their actions. This is the moral law and the basis of morality for God's people. We are to be moral simply because it reflects Gods behavior and made in His image we are made to resemble Him. Acting in a way that resembles Him, honours God because our actions imply that His characteristics are indeed at the very center of our being.

## Representing Him:

*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 heavens*

The concept of image is also related to our function to rule or have control over the rest of creation on God's behalf. So, this representative function is seen in ancient societies which had images of their rulers all over the lands over which the monarch ruled. These images represented the authority of the rulers. In the same way in our government offices we will always have portraits of our leaders there, as representative of their ruling authority

*Genesis 1:28 (ESV) And God blessed them. And God said to them, "**Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth** and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."*

Here we have the representative function where God had instructed the human couple to be fruitful and to multiply and cover the earth and be his authority representatives over the whole of created order on earth. This function is a blessing.

So let's recap the purpose of man

- **We are created to relate to God:** To worship and love Him in return.
- **We are created to resemble him:** In worshipping God we become like Him in our character and actions
- **We are created to represent him:** Only when we are able to resemble God will we be able to represent Him and rule over the whole of creation on His behalf

## **Why does God matter today?**

We now live in a world that largely ignores God or at least tries to. Created in the image of God man derives his ultimate value from his origin God because on his own man does not have any intrinsic value.

## **Why is the RM 5 note valuable after all it is only made of paper, what makes the difference?**

The stamp or image of the ruler on the note gives it value. Without it the note is just another worthless piece of paper. The image means this piece of otherwise worthless paper has the backing of the ruler. It is because of our design as being created in the image of God that human life is different from every other created life. If we are all products of a blind purposeless evolutionary process then there is no real distinction in value, because the mosquito would just have as much value as a human being. It is because we are created in the image of God where there is an intimate value in us because of the value of God's image. This is a verse from the Book of Ecclesiastes, if there is no God

*"The fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity. All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust" (Ecc. 3:19–20 NASB).*

The supreme God of the time and universe shows human beings are the only bearer of his image for a function that is special, unique, bearing his image to resemble him, to relate to him and to represent him. That is our destiny and that is our value. It is when we rebel against God, that we lose sight of Him and we also inevitably lose sight of who we are in the process.

## Questions on the text

1. Why is verse one very important?
2. Why is the creation account in 7 days and the sun and moon only created in the 4th day what does this show?
3. What does the creation account show us about God
4. What does the creation account show us about our nature and purpose in the created order?
5. What does the creation account tell us about how we should view the world?
6. What does it mean to be created in the image of God

## Application Questions

1. How does the existence of God in this universe impact how you will live today
2. What was the aim of the author of Genesis in the first chapter?
3. What does it mean to you personally to know that you were created in the image of God?
4. What gives God the right to interfere or give directions to how we are to live our lives