



Know Your Place

Grace Reigns: God's Gospel for All Peoples Series #2

Genesis 1:26-30

David Sunday

January 11, 2015

Open your Bibles to the first chapter of the Bible, Genesis 1. Last week was the beginning of a new series, which will be rather long and will take us through two of the greatest books of the Bible. They are foundational books for establishing a gospel-centered worldview. The book of Genesis tells us many stories, and the book of Romans provides us with a powerful theological argument. We are going to weave back and forth, season by season, through these two books. This season, we are in Genesis 1-11, and then we will turn to Romans 1-3 and see Paul brilliantly developing the doctrines that are in Genesis 1-11.

We are now going to look at what happened on the sixth day of creation. We are going to hear God's Word, beginning with Genesis 1:24:

²⁴ And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. ²⁵ And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ 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.

²⁸ 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." ²⁹ And God said,

“Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. ³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thanks be to God for His living, abiding and powerful Word! Amen.

Are we special or not? If you grew up sometime in the last couple of decades, you probably grew up under the influence of a big, purple dinosaur named Barney. If you knew Barney, you know what he thought of you: you are special! Everybody is special in his or her own way.

Back in 2012, however, the graduating class of Wellesley High School in the Boston area, who had grown up with Barney, heard a different take on existence. This time, they heard from one of their high school teachers. He gave a commencement speech that went viral. The main point of his speech was delivered with blunt force and irresistible logic: you are not special! He kept saying it repeatedly.

If you want to be in for a real treat, just Google the “You’re Not Special” graduation speech, and you will be amazed at what this teacher said. David McCullough caused quite a sensation when he told this high school graduating class:

Contrary to what your soccer trophy suggests, your glowing seventh grade report card, despite every assurance of a certain corpulent dinosaur, that nice Mr. Rogers, and your batty Aunt Sylvia, no matter how often your maternal Caped Crusader has swooped in to save you, you’re nothing special.

Who got it right—Barney or Mr. McCullough? I am here to tell you that both of them got it right, and neither of them got it right. There is truth to what both of them said, but half-truths disguised as whole-truths are not true. Unless you stand under the brilliant light of Scripture and see yourself in relationship to Jesus Christ, you cannot get a grip on your place in this world. You will not be able to understand why you exist. Until you stand under the brilliant light of Scripture, you are only going to see shadows of the truth. You are not going to see how it all fits together.

That is what God's Word wants to do for us today. It comes to us here on these first pages of Scripture—right in the first chapter of Scripture—and it starts addressing these questions to which, without any answers, we would be lost, adrift and tempted to ultimate despair.

Our questions include the following:

- Who are we?
- What is our place in this world?
- Why do we exist?

We need answers to these questions.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, author of Crime and Punishment, said, “The mystery of human existence lies not just in staying alive, but in finding something to live for.” That is true. How do we find something to live for? How can this story of the creation of humanity in Genesis 1 help us find something to live for?

First, we learn this lesson from Genesis 1: you will never find the purpose of your existence by making yourself the point of your existence. You are not that special. You are not the point of your existence. You are not the center of the universe. You are not the being around which everything else revolves.

Genesis 1's account of creation makes it very clear that human beings are creatures and nothing more. We were formed out of the dust (Genesis 2). We are earthlings. As we sing here at NCBC, “We are frail children of dust and feeble as frail.” We are created beings along with the rest of the world. We owe our existence not to ourselves but to the One Who breathed into us the breath of life. That agrees with another favorite song here: “It is Your breath in our lungs.” We exist by virtue of His goodness and grace.

With whom do we share our original, creative birth date? Notice who we share the sixth day of creation with in verses 24 and 25. It is with the livestock, the creeping things and the beasts of the earth. Biologists and anthropologists are correct when they make observations of similarities between the animal kingdom and us. We are not altogether different from the animals. We eat. We drink. We sleep. We breathe like they do. We were created on the same day they were.

Because of these similarities, some anthropologists and biologists write articles like this one: “The Case for the Personhood of Gorillas.” Hear these words:

She communicates in sign language using a vocabulary of over 1,000 words. She also understands spoken English and often carries on bilingual conversations. She responds in signs to questions asked in English. She is learning the letters of the alphabet and she can read some printed words, including her own

name. She has achieved scores between 85 and 95 on the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test.”

That is about a gorilla named Cocoa. She can do all those things. She is also able to make faces, draw representationally and laugh at her own jokes. These gorillas are amazing creatures! Sometimes people look at things like that and say, “What’s so special about being human? Aren’t we arrogant to claim that we are more significant—that there is a purpose to our existence and a greater dignity to us than all the other created beings? Are we more than just gorillas we wear pants? What makes us so special?”

Most people will intuitively say, “Yes, there is something special about human beings.” However, in our culture today, we do not know why. We cannot give a reason why human beings are more significant or why we have a purpose that makes us superior to the animals. In fact, I think many people today are embarrassed to even suggest that human beings are more significant than the animal kingdom. After all, the world clearly does not revolve around us.

From a materialistic point of view, the astronomer Carl Sagan got it right. He said, “From the space craft, Voyager, billions of miles away, our planet is just a tiny point of light in space—a pale, blue dot; a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark.”

So how are we significant? Is it because of our function in society? Then what happens when we are disabled or no longer able to work? Is it our relationships that make us significant? Well, animals have certain types of relationships as well. Is it love that makes us significant? How do you define love? Is it your achievements? Then what do you do with those who achieve less? How do you handle it when your achievements go unnoticed or someone else surpasses you? Is it your financial status, power, influence or position that makes you significant? What is it that makes us special?

Why is it that, when a lion kills another lion, no one gets post-traumatic stress disorder? Why is it that no one files a criminal complaint? No one puts the lion on trial. But when a human being kills another human being, that is called “murder,” and it is a capital crime, deserving of the ultimate penalty of law. Why? Is all of this just humanity asserting our own self-importance with no real foundation? Could another species of creatures come and assert their dominance over us, rendering us no more special than the apes? How do we find our place in this world? How do we find ourselves?

I heard about an Englishman who had a high-paying job in the banking industry in London. One day, he announced to his family, “I’m going to leave my job and travel to India in order to find myself.” His brother-in-law thought, “That’s an idiotic idea.” With wry humor, he

wrapped a present to give his brother-in-law on Christmas Day. When he had unwrapped the present, he found a mirror on which his brother-in-law had written in magic marker, “Save yourself the airfare.”

You are just as likely to find yourself by looking in a mirror as you are by traveling around the world to India. It cannot be done. If you question if that is true, read the book of Ecclesiastes. You cannot find yourself by traveling, by living for pleasure or work, by trying to gain the accolades of people, nor by how many followers you have on Instagram. You cannot find yourself by gazing on your own reflection and image, lest you become like Narcissus and fall into the pool and drown.

So how do you find something to live for? How do you gain a reason for being? You must first realize you are not the main point of your existence. You are a creature and were created for a purpose. You must look outside yourself and look to your Creator, or you will not know why you exist. You cannot know yourself until you start to know Him.

I want to do a little exercise here. How many of you are ten years old if age or under? I want to ask you three questions. I am so thankful you are in this service. Some of you are paying better attention than some of the adults are. You are listening well in this service and you are an important part of our congregation. You are going to help us learn some things about the point of our existence. You are going to teach us a few things.

If you are ten years old or less, I want you to answer this question: Who made you? Can you answer that? “God.” How many of you knew the answer to that question? God made you.

Here is the second question: What else did God make? “God made all things.” Everything that exists was made by God.

Now, here is the clincher. If you get this question right and believe this at ten years old, and if you let this question and answer guide your life and decisions, as you get older you are going to have a beautiful life. You are going to have a meaningful life if you believe this and live like this. Here is the third question: Why did God make all things? Does anyone know the answer to that question? Why did God make you and all things? “For His glory.” Yes, the answer is to glorify Him, or, in other words, God made you and all things for His glory.

You will never figure out the purpose of your existence if you make yourself the point of your existence, because you are not the point. You were made for God’s glory. He is the point.

How to Know the Purpose of Your Existence

You will only know the purpose of your existence when you find yourself in relationship with the Creator of your existence. What we discover in Genesis 1 is that our Creator has given to

man and woman a singularly special place in His creation. Some textual indicators tell us that, on the sixth day with the creation of humanity, something unparalleled, unique and extremely significant is taking place.

First, notice how much text is given to the creation of humanity. There is more column space given to the creation of humanity than to any of the other things God has made.

Second, notice that this is the grand finale of God's creation. We saw some fireworks on New Year's Eve because we were in a warm place. They always save the best for last—the grand finale. We are God's epic masterpiece and His crown jewel. We are His final creation.

Also, notice the language that is used to describe God creating man. With every other thing that God made, God says things like this: "Let there be light," and there was light. Or, "Let the earth sprout," and vegetation comes. Or He says, "Let the waters teem," and fish start swimming. But, in verse 26, God introduces the creation of humanity with these momentous words: "Let Us make man." Let Us do this! God begins an inner dialogue within His Person. I believe it foreshadows the reality of the Trinity. Just as we have the Spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters in verse two, there is a Tri-unity of Persons within the Godhead. God is having this conversation within the Godhead about the creation of humanity, saying, "My direct and personal involvement in their creation is especially important because they have special significance."

Over and over again, God speaks in the creation of humanity in a way that He does not with the other objects He created. Three times in verse 27 we see these very significant words: "God created." God created man. Finally, look at verse 31. It says, "*And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was [what?] very good.*" What was He saying before? It was good. But now that man has been created, God looks at His creation and says, "It is very good!"

So what is unique about humanity? What makes us special? We find it in verse 27. This is an extremely important verse. Today I want to describe the doctrine this verse is teaching because this is so important. Then next week is Sanctity of Life Sunday and we will trace more implications of this doctrine next week.

What makes humankind so unique? Verse 27: "*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*" Think about what you know about the Bible. What do you know about images of God in the Bible? What does He say about making images of Himself? It is prohibited. In the Ten Commandments, the second commandment says, "*You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth*" (Exodus 20:4).

This truth in Genesis 1:27 sheds new light on that commandment. No other image of God should be made in this created order, because no other image of God exists except for humanity. Men and women are the image of God in this world. The God Who created the sun, the stars, the seas, the plants, the fish, the birds and the creatures of the earth has placed in His created world an image of Himself. The image that God has placed in this world is humanity—men and women, boys and girls.

The way God wants us to honor His image is not by making statues or idols that we bow down to or worship. God wants us to honor and pay homage to His image by loving our neighbor who is created in the image of God, by looking at our fellow man and loving him or her as we love ourselves. That is why, when Jesus was asked, “What is the greatest commandment?” He said this: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself”* (Matthew 22:37-39). Why? Because man is created in the image and likeness of God. This is what distinguishes us from all other creatures. We are created in the *imago dei*, the image of God. We were made to have a relationship with God.

Now, I love many animals God has made and we do have an obligation not to be cruel to the animals. I think some of them are wonderful. We have had three dogs in our family, two of which have been great. Now I have a very special relationship with the dog we have right now. I like him a lot—he and I like to do many of the same things. We like to eat. We like to sleep. And we like to be close to Kate. We like to follow her around the house and spend time with her. We have that in common. We are not altogether dissimilar from one another.

However, there are things about me that are not true about my dog. My dog does not have a hunger to know God. My dog does not want to pray. He does not want to study the Scriptures and he does not feel guilt or shame when he does something wrong. He may look dejected once in awhile, but that quickly passes. When I sin, it troubles me greatly. I have a conscience.

Why is this? I am created in the image of God and after His likeness. This is something that is true of every human being, no matter who you are, where you are from or what your status is in this world. This is not just true of kings, the rich or powerful people who really matter in the world of men; this is true of everyone. This is true of people in nursing homes who have not stepped outside in years. This is true of people who have Alzheimer’s disease. This is true of unborn babies in the womb.

Tim Keller says, “There is a rock solid, objective, irreducible glory and significance and value and worth about you and about every human being there is.” This includes every one of us!

If you ask people who are merely naturalistic and scientific in their understanding of the world, they do not know why. Some of them even question if that is true. Does everyone have value? Does everyone have significance? Materialistic philosophy cannot find an answer to that question.

Why? The Bible and the Christian worldview say it is because we are created in the image of God. This has incredible implications for the way we view race and ethnicity. Did you notice that, in the creation of humankind, there is no distinction of races? With the other creatures, we read things like this in verse 24: “*Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.*” They were divided into different species and different strata.

With man, however, there is no division of species. God said, “Let us make man in our image and after our likeness.” This is what divides humanity. It is not our ethnic background or the color of our skin. God created us with much diversity. It is beautiful and should be celebrated, but it does not divide us from one another. Rather, it shows forth the glory of His image. That is what unites humanity. We are all created in the image of God.

This truth influenced and inspired so much of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s vision for civil rights in America. If you go see the movie that is coming out this week, Selma (which I am looking forward to seeing), I want you to understand that this was what drove King in his vision. In his sermon, “The American Dream,” he said these words:

You see, the founding fathers were really influenced by the Bible. The whole concept of the *imago dei* as it is expressed in Latin—the image of God—is the idea that all men have something in them that God injected. Not that they have substantial unity with God, but that every man has the capacity to have fellowship with God. And this gives him a uniqueness. It gives him worth. It gives him dignity. And we must never forget this as a nation. There are no gradations in the image of God. Every man, from a treble white to a bass black, is significant on God’s keyboard, precisely because every man is made in the image of God. One day, we will learn that. We will know one day that God made us to live together as brothers and to respect the dignity and worth of every man.

There is no distinction of race and no distinction of gender either. Male and female are both created in the image of God. This is the main thing that differentiates humanity: two genders. Male and female were both created by God and are both equal in the image of God. Both genders are afforded equal status and dignity before God.

So what does this mean for us? There are so many important implications of this truth and I look forward to exploring them next week. For now, I want to give you two basic categories

to think through theologically. The categories are reflection and representation. This gives you the clue and the key to your existence. We were made to reflect God in this world and we were made to represent Him in this world.

Why do you exist? Reason number one: you exist to reflect God's glory in this world. That is fundamental to how you were created. God made you to reflect His glory. It would be like preserving a picture for many generations. If a picture of me remained 300 years from now, someone could look at that picture and say, "That reflects something of who David Sunday was." We are the image of God. We are to reflect Him in this world.

I heard Tim Keller talking about a mirror on a cold day. You can point that mirror toward the sun and capture its light. If you point that mirror with the captured sunlight onto a piece of wood, you can start a fire that creates warmth and enables you to cook food and provide nourishment. That is what the purpose of your existence is in this world. You are a person who was created to have your soul look outward to God, not inward on yourself.

You are a person who was made to find your satisfaction and delight in knowing Him and reflecting Him in this world. You were created to behold His beauty and glory. As your soul, like a mirror, beholds that blazing glory, it concentrates the essence of God's glory and creates warmth. It is the warmth of God's love flowing through your life that brings nourishment to a world that is hungry and needs God. As you reflect God's glory, you bring the warmth of God's love to others and nourish others with the goodness of His grace and truth. You were created to reflect God's glory in this world. Why did God make you and all things? He made you for His own glory.

Second, you exist to represent God's rule over this world. Look at the pattern in verses 26-28. In verse 26, God says, "*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. [And then He talks about ruling.] 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.*" The same happens in verses 27 and 28. We are created in God's image, then God blesses us and says to us, "Be fruitful. Multiply. Fill the earth. Subdue it and have dominion."

To be created in the image of God means I exist to represent God's rule over this world. Image / Rule. Image / Rule. That is the pattern. God is the greater Ruler and He has given to mankind ruling authority. You have given Him dominion over all the creatures, over the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. He is the King; we are His princes and princesses—His vice-regents on earth. This rule carries with it responsibility.

I want you to notice something. Compare God's blessing of the animals in verse 22 with God's blessing of humanity in verse 28. See if you notice a difference. Verse 22 says, "*And God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.'*" Then verse 28 says, "*And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply...'*" What is the difference? Did you notice? God "*said to them.*" God speaks directly to humanity. With the birds and the fish, God says, "Be fruitful and multiply," but they have no choice; it is just what they do. However, with humanity, God engages with us on a personal level.

This is the first time in Scripture that God speaks to His creatures with the expectation that we will be able to understand His communication. He speaks to man personally, treating us as people who are responsible for our actions. It starts with blessing. "Enjoy My creation." God has made a wonderful world for us to enjoy.

I sing the mighty power of God, that made the mountains rise,
That spread the flowing seas abroad, and built the lofty skies.
I sing the wisdom that ordained the sun to rule the day;
The moon shines full at God's command, and all the stars obey...
There's not a plant or flower below, but makes Thy glories known,
And clouds arise, and tempests blow, by order from Thy throne.

("I Sing the Mighty Power of God," Isaac Watts, 1715)

We marvel at the creation God has made. It is so full of beauty and wonder. God says to us, "It is for you! It is for your enjoyment. It is all yours. Take care of it. Rule over it. Study it. Learn from it. Develop it."

How do we exercise this rule? God says in verse 28 that we are to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth. The natural world needs plenty of rulers, managers and vice-regents. As God's people, we should be positive about having and raising children, whether they are born to us biologically or adopted into our families. Whether it is through our influence in the church, as God enables us, we should be passionate about multiplying a new generation of people who know God and who know that their purpose in the world is to bring glory to Him. Children are a blessing, not a burden.

We also exercise this rule by subduing the earth. In verse 28, God commands man to "*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.*" This is what theologians have called "the cultural mandate." God has given us an astonishing amount of authority in this world. This creation, with all its goodness, needs to be managed. We are like God's senior vice presidents over Planet Earth. He

is telling us that we need to study the earth, bring it under control and channel its resources in ways that will bring blessing.

It is from this commandment in verse 28 that we see the biblical basis for engagement in things like agriculture, research, manufacturing, art, music, technology and medicine. It is the kind of work you are doing six days a week. It matters to God. That is why it is so good we are starting a class on vocation in our Institute of Disciple-Makers. We need to understand that following Jesus is not something we do on Sundays. It is not just about so-called spiritual things. It is about all of life, especially what we do in our work. It has great significance, dignity and value. We are people created in God's image and have been entrusted with God's rule and responsibility to reflect and represent His rule on earth.

What about Responsibility?

I want to end by talking a little bit about responsibility. How are you doing with taking responsibility for your family, your life, your work and your place in this world? God says to have dominion, rule and subdue. We have a responsibility. Some of us have more responsibilities than others. If you have more responsibility, it does not mean you are more important. It simply means you have a greater responsibility to look out for those who may be unable to do as much. You should love, protect and serve those who have less ability.

I want to ask you a few questions that came from a book I read by Alistair Payne:

- Is there any area in your life where you are tempted to shirk your responsibilities?
- In your family, are you tempted to go into autopilot, failing to engage and be active in the leadership of your home?
- In your work life, do you think, "I don't see any connection between this job and this God Who created me"?
- In your community, are you running away from anything? Are you refusing to face up to problems?
- Are you procrastinating? Are you passing the buck? Are you careless? Do you ever envy your dog or your cat? Do you ever look at that animal and say, "I wish I could be like that, lying around all day and having no one expect much from me"?
- Do you run away from the privileged role God has given you as a human being created in His image, entrusted with real responsibilities that matter to Him?

This is all part of His rule and He is entrusting that to you. What responsibilities has God given you that you need to face up to today? What has God called you to? Where is He calling you to exercise your God-given role of rule?

Along with that, I want to ask you this question: Why do these words, rule and subdue, make us so uneasy? They do! When we hear about humanity ruling and subduing the earth, we get nervous. Why is that? We are supposed to represent God's rule. The rule and reign of God is a cause of rejoicing in the Bible. Psalm 97:1 says, "*The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad!*"

The reign of humanity is not always a cause of rejoicing. Why? Well, what happens when human beings do not turn their souls outward to God but, instead, turn inward? We become mirror men and women, looking in on ourselves. When we do that, we shut out the light and become reflectors of darkness. What happens when human beings rule, reign and exercise authority and dominion while, at the same time, rejecting the authority of God? We become mediators of bondage and oppression, not of blessing. That is what happens. (We will hear more on this next week.)

Consider what happens when men reject God's rule but exert their own rule and authority over women. What happens is sex trafficking and pornography, which feeds off the sex trafficking industry.

What happens when men reject God's rule but exert their own rule and authority over the poor, over the marginalized, over those who are powerless to defend themselves? Exploitation happens.

What happens when we reject God's rule but exert our own rule and authority over people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds? Racial profiling and discrimination often happen.

What happens when we reject God's rule but exert our own rule and authority over those who can no longer make material contribution to society? Elimination happens. We get rid of the people who are not functioning.

What happens when we reject God's rule but exert our own rule and authority over the unborn? Abortion on demand occurs. When a society like ours—whose Bill of Rights and whose concept of civil rights developed around a general consensus about the *imago dei* (man created in the image of God)—rejects that rule of God, it no longer has any solid basis for equal rights, civil rights and human rights. We become tyrants. We become contradictory images. We become caricatures. We become grisly shadows of what God created us to be.

That is why G.K. Chesterton said these words: "Whatever else is true of man, it is certainly true that man is not what he was meant to be." That is the truth. Do you need proof? Look at what we did with God's image when He came and dwelt among us. The One Who is the image of the invisible God—the One Who perfectly represents the *imago dei*—the Lord Jesus Christ dwelt among us. We beheld His glory, full of grace and truth. And what did we do to Him? When He

was born, He was almost a victim of infanticide. When He lived, He lived in poverty. He had no place to lay His head. He died with just the garment on His back. He was a victim of injustice. He faced trumped up charges of crimes He did not commit. He did not receive a fair trial, and then He was lynched and crucified. That is what we did with the *imago dei*—the perfect image of God. When He walked among us, we trampled on Him. We crucified Him. We nailed Him to the cross.

But He rose from the dead. Because He rose from the dead, the image of God in man has not been destroyed. Jesus is restoring, renewing and recreating humanity, making a new creation in Himself. In Him, humanity finds an answer to its original purpose. In Jesus, you can become a new man or a new woman, who is “*being renewed in knowledge after the image of [your] creator*” (Colossians 3:10). In Jesus, you can find something to live for.

As we come to this communion table, I urge you to turn your heart outward to God. Let His light shine on you. As His light shines on you, you will begin to reflect His glory, which is what you were created to do. As we come to this table, I urge you to submit your will to Him and say, “You are my King, Lord Jesus. It is for You that I must live.” Ask Him to fill you with His Holy Spirit and cause His fruit to ripen in your life, so that you can represent Him well on this earth.

I urge you to keep looking to Jesus and keep looking for His return. Do it with hope, because “*when he appears we shall be like him*” (1 John 3:2). We shall be conformed to His image, for we shall see Him as He is.

Let’s pray together.

Father, we come to You in the name of Your Son, Jesus. We confess to You that we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We have failed to reflect Your glory in this world and we have misrepresented Your rule. We have often taken the authority You have given us and used it in ways that do not bring blessing but harm to people. We have worshiped an image of ourselves and made ourselves the focal point of our existence. In doing so, we have lost the ability to love our neighbor. Lord, we pray that You would have mercy on us and help us see a reflection of Your glory in the face of every human being. Help us, Lord, to honor all whom You have created, from the womb to the grave. Help us to love all our neighbors, even those whom we might struggle to like. Teach us, Lord, to respond to them the way You have responded to us with such kindness and patience.

We thank You, Lord, that You came into our world with mercy toward sinners. Though we trampled Your image and nailed You to a cross, You rose from the dead so we could become a new creation—a new man, a new woman. Apart from You, we have no life, but in You, we have

life and we have it more abundantly. As we take this bread and drink this cup, Lord, strengthen us through our union with Christ. Encourage us by reminding us that we are His and He is ours. We belong to Him in a living, lasting and loving union that nothing in all creation can sever. Help us, Lord, to become more like Jesus, so that we can reflect Your image in this world. We pray in His name. Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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