

LESSON 1

GOD'S PURPOSE FOR A GOOD WORLD

"In the beginning God created" (Gen. 1:1). God freely chose to create the world. He did not have to create. The choice was fully His. The purpose was His.

Man's search for understanding requires him to ask, Why did God create the world; what was His purpose? To answer this question is not easy. Yet only by seeking the answer can man discover God's purpose, what He wanted the world to be like, and what ends or goals He anticipated. Such understanding also will enable man to better fulfill his role as the steward of God's creation.

The major obstacle to man's understanding of God's purpose in creation is sin. Sin not only limits man's ability to comprehend God's intent, it also robs him of the willingness to participate in the purpose. Man's sin set the world of material things under a curse (Gen. 3). Living under this curse in a fallen state, man finds it nearly impossible to appreciate the beauty, the perfect order, and the divine intent of creation.

Fallen man lives in a sin-cursed world that has been tarnished by his sins. His only hope of understanding comes when he begins to look back through his experience with God, the Redeemer. In this experience he sees that the God who lovingly redeems him is the same God who creates. It is a great discovery for man to recognize that the same God who creates also recreates in Jesus Christ. It is even more significant to discover that what God is seeking to do in the saving work of Christ is the same thing He set out to do in creation. God's purpose remains the same.

Christ, the Redeemer, is the key to man's understanding of God's work in creation. In Christ, man can understand that God made a good world and designed it to achieve His good purposes.

The World Was Good in Its Origin

God is good; His world is good.

For the world to be other than good is impossible. God's nature is such that He could not have created otherwise. The world is His work, and it reflects His character. It is completely dependent upon Him for its origin, purpose, and continuing existence.

God Himself describes the world as good. Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 25, and 31 record the Creator's reaction, "It was good." This description comes at the end of each phase of creation as God paused to view His work. Not

Are the following statements true or false?

1. *Man does not need to know why God created the world.* _____

2. *God's lack of clarity is man's main obstacle to understanding God's purpose for the world.* _____

3. *The Creator is also the Redeemer.* _____

4. *Christ helps man know that God made a good world.* _____

(1. false; 2. false; 3. true; 4. true)

Name four reasons why the world is good.

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

(4) _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

even the casual reader of Genesis 1 can miss God's pleasure with His world. He saw that it was perfect in harmony, in purity, and in beauty.

God is distinct from His creation.

God made the world and often reveals Himself to man through His world. But the world is not God. The psalmist declared, "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork" (Ps. 19:1, RSV). God is distinct from His world, yet His good purposes and intent are revealed in it. To understand what is meant by His material world being "good" requires more than simply thinking, This stone is good. Actually, the stone has no moral character of itself. The good of material things is related to their purpose. Everything was good because it was made to serve God's good purposes. Paul reminded Timothy, "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving" (1 Tim. 4:4, RSV). God rebuked Peter saying, " 'What God has cleansed, you must not call common' " (Acts 10:15, RSV).

The world, even in its beauty, is not God. It is never to be considered as a part of God. God made it to serve Him, but it is not God. Man must recognize this and worship the Creator and never the created.

The World Was Good in Its Perfect Order

God saw the land, vegetation, and animal life as good. They were good as they were and especially good as they fitted into the perfect order. Man, too, was seen to be good. He was created good in himself and also good in that he found his chief end for life in serving God.

A perfect order is established.

The goodness of creation is best seen in the perfect order established by God. Each element of creation is good, for it fits into and complements this plan. Man's good end or purpose is not to be found in himself but in the holy and perfect intent of God. This fact should remind man that there is a higher dimension in life; namely, the purposes of God.

God's perfect order that made everything good calls for a clear line of authority and purpose. This line begins with God, who has absolute authority. To man is assigned a secondary or delegated authority of managing the world of created things. To men God said, " 'You are masters of the fish and birds and all the animals' " (Gen. 1:28, TLB).¹

The clear line of assigned purpose in creation also begins with God. All creation is designed to serve God's aims. It was His plan from the beginning to make man, so it follows that in the perfect plan the material world was to be a home for man. Man was not created until everything was ready. A comprehensive view of the divine plan reveals

Complete the following sentences.

God often reveals Himself through _____

God is not the _____

The good of material things is related to their _____

(His, world, world, purpose)

God's creation calls for a clear line of _____
and _____

(authority, purpose)

All creation is designed to serve _____

that material things serve not only man's needs but also the needs of created things. To man God declared, " 'I have given you the seed-bearing plants throughout the earth, and all the fruit trees for your food.' " To the animals He provided the grass and plants. " 'And I've given all the grass and plants to the animals and birds for their food' " (Gen. 1:29-30, TLB).

(God's aims)

Scientists are discovering more of the secrets of God's perfect order. This is illustrated in the life cycle between man and material things. Man, for example, breathes oxygen and exhales carbon dioxide. Plants, in return, breathe carbon dioxide and produce oxygen. The inspired writers discerned these marvels of God. Isaiah wrote:

It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; who brings princes to nought, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. (Isa. 40: 22, 23, RSV; see also Job 38; Ps. 8; 19; 104).

Man is given a special place in the order.

Then God said, "Let us make a man—someone like ourselves, to be the master of all life upon the earth and in the skies and in the seas." So God made man like his Maker. Like God did God make man; man and maid did he make them. And God blessed them and told them, "Multiply and fill the earth and subdue it; you are masters of the fish and birds and all the animals" (Gen. 1:26-28, TLB).

Of all God's creation, man is the _____

Man is chosen for a special place in the good order.—Man is the climax of God's creation. He is made from the earth, an earthling. This gives him a close tie to earth. He is a part of the created world and shares many common needs with the rest of creation. Yet man is different—quite different. By the choice of God he is set apart from the rest of creation. That which makes him different is his being made "in the image of God." The Bible does not indicate that any other part of creation is given this rare distinction. It is said only of man. God personally fashions man from the earth and imparts to him His own "breath." Man is special; he is like God.

(climax)

"Like God," "in the image of God,"—what an awesome meaning this gives to man. When man recognizes this, he comes to the highest possible idea of self-identification. If anyone loses the sense of what life is all about and asks himself, "Who am I?" the Bible gives the answer. He is someone like God. As awesome as this signal honour is, man is to remember that he is like God, is to "image" God; he is not God. God did not make man to be a "little god." He selected for man a special function in the world as His representative.

It is impossible to understand all that is meant by this term "in the image of God." It is clear, however, that man's place before God and in the world is special and unique.

Man's place before God and the world is _____ and _____

He has a special relationship to God and to the rest of creation. J. Morris Ashcraft described this special place as an “in between” position.² He is “in between” God and the rest of creation. This gives him a special responsibility to God and for the material world. Caution is needed in attempting to interpret this likeness to God in terms of physical appearance. J. Leo Green explained that “the image of God” means at least that man has a unique relatedness to God.³

(special, unique)

Man has a delegated authority.—“ You are masters of the fish and birds and all the animals ” (Gen. 1:28, TLB). God’s perfect order for creation calls for man to be in control of the material world. Man is given real authority that involves trusted responsibility. The authority is real, yet always a secondary or delegated authority. The Bible portrays man as being subject to the final and ultimate rule of God.

Man is subject to the final and ultimate _____ of _____.

Man’s role of dominion in the earth is always under the supreme authority of God. Man rules over the material world under God to achieve God’s perfect plan. This perfect idea of man in charge of the earth and discharging this responsibility under God moved God to say, “it was very good” (Gen. 1:31).

(rule, God)

This delegated authority given to man embraces these ideas:

1. Man is to exercise his authority under God.
2. Man is to remember that he received the authority in a trust relationship to God.
3. Man is to seek to achieve God’s purposes in the use he makes of the material world.
4. Man is to be free in his stewardship role, but is to realize that it is a responsible freedom.

Man is to live the responsible life.—The life of God’s man is a stewardship life—the responsible life. Two phrases summarize the stewardship life of man. First, he is to be God’s responsible representative in the world. Second, he is to be God’s responsible manager of the world. The focus is on the word “responsible,” for God made man to live the responsible life.

Man is to be God’s responsible _____ and God’s responsible _____.

(representative, manager)

Man’s responsibility is to “image” or reflect God. Alexander the Great was proud of his army and demanded responsible conduct of his soldiers. As he was reviewing his troops, a young soldier charged with unbecoming conduct was brought before him. The account of his misdeeds was read. The great leader asked the soldier his name. “Alexander,” was the reply. The world conqueror demanded, “Either change your conduct or your name!”

Strike out the incorrect words.

Whether man looks like God is debatable and unanswerable, but it is clear that he is to reflect or mirror God. His life, attitudes, and actions are to reflect in action God and His purpose. God forbade man to make images of anything in heaven or on earth as objects of worship (Ex. 20:4). Man is to be a living “image”—not an object of worship, but a

Man is to mirror God’s wrath, love, knowledge, character, miracles, purpose.

representation of God. Man is to image God, mirroring God's love, character, and purpose. What God is like, man is to demonstrate in action. What God wants done, man is to perform.

The design of creation anticipates that man will cultivate his kinship with God. Man's kinship with God and the accompanying accountability for God's creation is a recurring theme in biblical revelation. Man's accountability is seen in Christ's parables. He made responsibility for material things the theme of sixteen of His thirty-eight parables. The word "faithful" is used as a synonym for "responsibility." In His parable of the dishonest steward, Jesus said, " And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? " (Luke 16:12, RSV).

Freedom is a major characteristic of the responsible life. God made man with the capacity to determine his own course and free to decide what his choices would be. He is, at the same time, accountable for his response. He can say yes to God. He can say no. He is responsible for all that is involved in his decisions. God's desire is for man to enjoy this responsible freedom. Unfortunately, man does not always choose to live the responsible life and enjoy the good and perfect order intended by God. He sins instead. His sins disrupt and thwart God's intended good. A later chapter will focus on this disaster of man's sin.

The World Was Good in the Creator's Purpose

It is foolish to try to guess what is in the mind of God. On the other hand, much can be understood of God, His thinking, and His purpose through His recorded revelation. From this source, it appears that God's purposes for creation had two closely-related aims. First, God created the world to fulfil His own plans. Second, He created the world to serve the good of man.

Creation is to achieve God's purposes.

God's own reasons or purposes have to be the intent of all creation. If there could be any other purpose, that would mean something or someone is above God. Therefore, no other end is possible except God's aim.

God's purpose was to create man.—God's purpose was to create man like Himself, free so that he could of his own choice respond to God in love and faith. A people that would respond to Him and be His by their own choice seems to be the desire of God in creation. This is expressed in Isaiah: " The wild beasts will honour me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise " (43:20-21, RSV). This idea of a people of God is echoed throughout the Old Testament. It reaches its highest form in the redeemed of God through Jesus Christ.

The community of believers (the Church) in the New Testament is the most beautiful demonstration of the people

(wrath, knowledge, miracles)

Freedom is a major characteristic of the _____

(responsible, life)

Is the following statement true or false?

It appears that God's purpose for creating the world was for His own plans and to serve the good of man.

(true)

List three purposes God had for creating the world.

1. _____

of God. Perhaps the clearest definition of this purpose of God is stated by the apostle Paul: "Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will" (Eph. 1:4-5, RSV; see also Acts 17:27).

God's plan was for man to be free.—Some skeptics say that a good God could not have made a man that would sin. However, for man to be what God wanted, he had to be free. He had to be free to respond favourably to God or to reject Him. God's satisfaction or glory could come only from a man who, being free to curse Him, would instead choose to return His love. God could have made man like a robot and programmed him always to answer with love. This would be like a man building a machine with a built-in recording that would say at the press of a button, "I love you." Man would find little satisfaction in such an expression. God made man free but answerable and accountable for his decisions. Nothing less than a responsible man who chooses to serve God could fulfil the purposes of God in creation.

God's purpose was to enter His world.—God decided to enter His world as a "man" even before He created it (Eph. 1:4). In this light, the created world can be seen as being made for the Son of God. This helps to explain Colossians 1:15, 16: "He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him" (RSV). God made the world with the intent to enter it so that He could redeem rebellious and sinful man to Himself. This unfolding intent of God made it necessary for man to experience God the Redeemer before he could fathom God the Creator. Understanding this, it is possible to see why all biblical revelation points to the coming of Christ. It is the coming of Christ that fulfils God's purpose in creating the world.

Creation is for man's good.

Man is the centre of interest in the creation of God. All other created things are less than man and are designed by God for man's good. This is the way God planned His perfect order. The physical world provides the environment in which God shapes His people. Man is given the material world for his use. He is to use it, not abuse it. When man is right with God, he uses things properly. When he is wrong with God, all is wrong in the world. Right or wrong, man is still in the image of God. He is still responsible, and the world is still intended for his good.

For man's physical care.—Material things are essential to man. This is God's plan. Man requires the benefits of material things for the care and sustaining of his body, for the health of his mind, and for the balance of his emotions.

"To you it shall be for meat" (Gen. 1:29) is part of God's instruction to man. Jesus demonstrated His recogni-

2. _____

3. _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Is the following statement true or false?

Man is expected to abuse the material world.

(false)

What lessons can be learned about the material world from John 6:1-14?

tion of this basic need of man as He took the five barley loaves and the two fish from the lad and multiplied them to feed the hungry five thousand (John 6:1–14). In the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15) man was the caretaker, and he enjoyed the limitless resources. He was free to eat of it all, with the exception of the one forbidden tree. Man's Fall did not alter his dependence on material things. After the Fall he was to gain his food from the land by his toil. Man's sin did not cause him to be dependent on material things. God made material things for man. Jack Taylor observed:

Is it one great cosmic accident that the air is just the right texture, the substance the earth produces the exact requirement the need demands, or is there a great plan of providence whereby God in his glorious unity created it all with a wonderful purpose in mind? We affirm that it is the latter!⁴

For man's enjoyment.—"God who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17, RSV) is Paul's way of affirming the divine intent for man to enjoy the material world. Creation is good and is a joy to God. God wants man to enjoy it also.

No other note is so clear in the Old and the New Testaments as that of joy. It speaks of a quality of life that belongs to the man who properly relates his life to God and to God's world of things. It is a joy that allows man to bask in the great beauty and resources of God. This is the idea of the word "Eden" which means "delight, happiness, and bliss."

Christianity is founded on the recognition that this is "my Father's world," that the material world is good. Christian faith sees the material world and its reclaimed use in the redemptive plan of God.

For man's creative expression.—God worked and enjoyed the results of His work. It is part of God's design for the world that man should work and in his labour find a creative sense of fulfilment. Material things provide man with tools for self-expression. God endowed man with inventive abilities so that he could use material things to make life better, to bless the bodies, minds, and hearts of men. Paul was proud of his occupation as a tentmaker. In Corinth he stayed with Aquila and joined with him in their common occupation as tentmakers (Acts 18:3). In his letter to the Thessalonians Paul called them "to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we charged you; so that you may command the respect of outsiders, and be dependent on nobody" (1 Thess. 4:11–12, RSV).

For man's fuller life.—Material things play a vital role in the God-man relationship. Nature is not God, but it is a means of revealing God. Through material beauty man can gain an increased awareness of the nearness and majesty of God. The psalmist expressed this understanding, "When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast established; what is man that thou art mindful of him" (Ps. 8:3–4, RSV); and again, "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Draw a line under the correct answer.

Christianity sees the world as:

"evil," "immaterial," "my Father's," "spiritual"

("my Father's")

Man should _____ and find fulfilment in his

(work, labour)

Material things help give man a _____ life.

(fuller)

firmament proclaims his handiwork" (Ps. 19:1, RSV; see also Col. 1:17; Ps. 104; Job 38-41).

For man to have a means of service.—Material possessions give man a tangible way to express himself in service to others. This might be called the religion of the tangible. It involves the use of material things in a way that testifies to the Lordship of Christ and to a love for fellowman. Man is to serve his fellowman. Jesus strongly advanced this concept. He put service above possessions. When the two disciples came to Him asking for the place of honour on His right hand, He used the occasion to explain greatness. He said. "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant" (Mark 10:43, RSV). Service is Christ's formula for greatness.

The famous Curie family are noted for their work related to radioactivity. For their great contributions to man, this family of French physicists were awarded three Nobel prizes. Pierre and Marie became interested in the radioactive qualities in uranium. From two tons of uranium ore (pitchblende) they isolated small amounts of two highly radioactive new chemicals and named them "radium" and "polonium."

The Curies' greatness is reflected as much in their attitudes as in their achievements. They were offered large sums of money and encouraged to exploit their discovery. They could have said: "This find belongs to us. We discovered it, and we will demand all that can be gained from it." Instead they refused the wealth they could have claimed. They felt that radium belonged to all mankind and should serve man's needs.

God's purpose for man is that he will serve God and his fellowman. Material things in man's hands become a tangible way to fulfil this purpose. That man is to use his material resources as a means of service is the subject of many biblical accounts. This list calls for man:

1. To be of service in material blessings (Rom. 15:27, RSV).
2. To give for fellow Christians who are in need (1 Cor. 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 8-9; Acts 4:32; Gal. 5:14).
3. To care for hungry and needy people (1 John 3:17; Jas. 1:27; 2:16; Matt. 10:42).
4. To support the ministry (1 Cor. 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 11:9).

Material possessions used as a service to God and man allow the believer to say in a tangible way: "I love God. I belong to Christ."

Notes

¹ The Bible verses in this book marked "TLB" or *The Living Bible* are taken from *The Living Bible, Paraphrased* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1971) and are used by permission.

² J. Morris Ashcraft, "A Theological Rationale for Christian Stewardship," *Resource Unlimited*, ed. William L. Hendricks (Nashville: The Stewardship Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1972), p. 11. Used by permission.

³ J. Leo Green, "The Place of Material Things in the Purpose of God and the Life of Man," *ibid.*, p. 57. Used by permission.

⁴ Jack Taylor, "The Why and Wherefore of Things," *ibid.*, p. 47. Used by permission.

Material possessions give man a _____ way to express himself in _____ to others.

(tangible, service)

What do the following Scriptures teach?

Rom. 15:27 _____

1 Cor. 16:1-3 _____

1 John 3:17 _____

2 Cor. 11:9 _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Home Study Exercise

Basic activity (Levels 1, 2, and 3). Read the study guide text and answer the following.

1. In what ways does sin keep man from enjoying full knowledge of God's purpose for a good world?

2. List four reasons why we can say that God's world is good. _____

3. What is meant by the statement: "The world is not God."? _____

4. Why can we say that "everything was good"? _____

5. Describe the line of authority in God's perfect order. _____

6. What does the author mean by man's delegated authority? _____

7. What two phrases summarize man's stewardship of life? _____

8. List three of God's characteristics that man is to "image" or "mirror." _____

9. What is the relation of man's freedom to the responsible life? _____

10. What two closely-related aims appear to be God's purposes for creation? _____

11. List three purposes God had for creating His world. _____

12. When did God decide to enter His world as a man? _____

13. Why did God want to enter His world? _____

14. Explain the author's statement: "He (man) is to use it (material world), not abuse it." _____

15. How does Christianity view the material world? _____

16. What is the place of work in God's purpose? _____

17. What does the author mean by "the religion of the tangible"? _____

18. List four ways that man should use his material resources as a means of service. Give Scripture references to support your answers. _____

19. Prepare a sermon or Bible lesson outline on one of the following subjects:
 "Man Before and After the Fall"
 "God's World and Man's Sin"
 "Why Creation?"
20. Read pages 25-40 in *God's Miraculous Plan of Economy*.

Supplementary activity (Levels 2 and 3). After reading pages 25-40 in *God's Miraculous Plan of Economy*, do the following:

1. Write a development of the sermon outline assigned in Basic activity.
2. List the seven foundational "planks" in Taylor's discussion on God's plan of economy.
3. Write an answer to this question: What is the difference in "Reason Giving" and "Revelation Giving" according to Dr. Taylor?

Advanced activity (Level 3).

1. Prepare a sermon or Bible lesson outline using a subject suggested from reading pages 25-40 of *God's Miraculous Plan of Economy*. Use the suggested Scriptures. Include any other passages you wish to add. Show Scripture references for your outline. Use a different subject from the one selected for number 2 of Supplementary activity.

2. Ask five men and five women of your acquaintance these questions. Share your findings with the Seminar group. (See p. 38 for help with this question.) DO NOT USE THE NAMES OF THOSE SURVEYED!

Do you give to the poor? Why?

3. After reading pages 25-40 in Taylor's book, summarize the seven stewardship principles he names. State if you agree with the author or not. Write a brief paragraph to support your position on each principle.
4. Write a paper to show these principles can become the life-style of the Christian and the church.

Seminar Discussion

1. Discuss the inability of fallen man to appreciate the beauty, order, and divine intent of creation.
2. Discuss Jack Taylor's statement: "God wants His wealth in Circulation."
3. Compare the privileges and the responsibilities placed on man as the climax of God's creation.
4. How can man use material resources as a means of service?
5. Compare sermon or lesson outlines of Level 1 students. Ask Level 2 and 3 students to share their sermons or Bible lessons with the seminar group.
6. Discuss the reading (pages 25-40) of *God's Miraculous Plan of Economy*. Evaluate the parts of Dr. Taylor's plan that will work and the parts that will not work in your area. Use Scripture to support the positions taken.