

“God Created” **Genesis 1:1**

Introduction

1. **Sometimes I get discouraged.** Lots of different reasons.
 - It may be because I’m tired or busy or stressed or overwhelmed with too much to do.
 - Sometimes it’s because I’m just in over my head.
 - Then there are people who have the gift of discouragement and choose to give their gift to me—you know the types . . . critical; cynical; difficult; dysfunctional.
 - And, the news can be discouraging: the economy; terrible crimes; awful injustices (this week I heard of an African woman who was gang raped and then forced to do the laundry of the men who assaulted her; it turned out that they are part of a terrorist organization and anyone who has aided terrorists is denied a refugee visa to the United States—it’s not that I am condemning the law or want terrorists in my country; it’s just so discouraging the way so many people suffer).
 - Charleen and I were in Arizona when the Tucson shooter killed six and wounded others, including Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords. How profoundly sad and how frightening to those who hold political office.

But, probably my #1 discourager is me. I have goals I don’t reach. I have sins I don’t want. I get weary with my own weaknesses and inadequacies. Sometimes I just get discouraged. And, I’m not alone. We all get discouraged.

2. **Where do we go when we need encouragement?** What do we do when we are down and need to be lifted up? Where do we get the hope and strength to go on?

3. **There are multiple resources for encouragement but high on the Christian’s list is the Bible, the Word of God.**

The ancient Hebrew people faced major league discouragements that make all of my issues seem like fantasy football. The people of Israel were enslaved for four centuries in Egypt—their sons were murdered; they were beaten and abused. When they finally escaped they wandered for forty years in a desert before coming to the Promised Land they had to fight wars to win. They brought a lot of problems on themselves but they also faced evil kings, famines and repeated foreign invasions. Lots of discouragement.

The New Testament Christians had different discouragements but no less real. There were controversies in churches and persecution from the Roman government. Many were slaves. Taxes were oppressive. Military service was often conscripted. Plagues were common. Poverty was everywhere.

Where did the people of Israel and the followers of Jesus go for encouragement? They opened their Bibles. They were heartened by the Word of God. Most of them were illiterate and even those who could read and write didn’t usually have scrolls or books of their own. So, they memorized what the Bible said. They counted God’s Words not magical . . . they were supernatural. When God spoke they listened. When God spoke they were encouraged. When God spoke they received the courage and strength to go on.

4. **Now we have the same words of God.** Many of us have multiple Bibles in our homes and pretty much all of us can read God’s Word for ourselves. When our hearts are heavy, when our souls are dry, when we are so down and discouraged that we don’t think we can go on . . . we have the same Bible, the same truth and the same words from God that encouraged those earlier generations.
5. **Over the coming weeks and months we are going to journey through the Bible’s words of encouragement.** We will study what God says. We will memorize the words so we don’t forget. We will listen to God and we will be encouraged by him.
6. **We begin where millions have begun, with the first ten words of the Bible:** *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth* (Genesis 1:1). As my unbelieving college journalism professor taught, “You cannot say anything more profound and you cannot say it more simply.” The first encouraging words of the Bible are just that—simple and profound.

Science

1. **Strangely and sadly, our modern generation has made these simple and profound words more about science than about God.** It is unimaginable to me that the author of these words and the first hearers of these words would think about science, evolution or the age of the earth. Yet, that is what Genesis 1 first brings to mind for many from the New Atheists to new creationists.
2. **I have read and heard the arguments of those who mock the Bible as incongruent with the discoveries of modern science and those who mock the scientists as evil atheists.** Not that the debate isn’t important because it is. Not that the debate is new because it isn’t.
And sometimes it is ironic. For example, those who dispute evolution are sometimes called “Fundamentalists” as a sort of name-calling. The word comes from a series of 90 essays in 12 volumes published by the Bible Institute of Los Angeles from 1910 to 1915 under the title *The Fundamentals*. This series of free books gave birth to the description of “Fundamentalists.” Contrary to current popular notion, these essays tackled significant and sophisticated theological and practical issues and were written by some premier 20th century scholars. The essay on “Science and Christian Faith” (in Volume IV) was written by the Scottish historian and theologian James Orr in which he argues for “theistic evolution” and expresses his belief in an old earth. I suppose, technically speaking, to be a Fundamentalist is to be a theistic evolutionist! (*Who woulda thunk?*)
3. **Some of the most brilliant and most famous modern scientists are committed Christians who believe the Bible and seek its profound encouragement.** One whom I have gotten to know over the past couple of years is Francis Collins who headed the Human Genome Project and now is Director of the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland. Collins, a medical doctor who also has a PhD in physical chemistry from Yale, was a self-described atheist. His experiences with dying patients led him on a journey of discovery.

It was on a fall afternoon while on a hike when he was awed by God’s creation that he accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior and became a Christian. He is a really nice man, a world-class renowned scientist and a committed believer. His is an interesting story that fascinates our generation because we really get into science and religion.

4. But, we miss the point and miss the encouragement of Genesis 1:1 when we switch the focus from God to science.

5. House Story:

Let’s suppose that one day you drive past the biggest most beautiful house you have ever seen (perhaps like the Biltmore Estate outside of Asheville, NC—the largest private residence in the USA with a 135,000 square foot mansion with 250 rooms, a three mile long driveway and 8,000 acres).

You are dazzled by the size, beauty and magnificence of the building and grounds. One of the first questions you ask is, “Whose house is that?” You are told the owner’s name and that he wants to meet you.

When you meet the very rich owner and get to know him he makes an offer that takes your breath away. He invites you to live in his mansion, free of charge. When it’s time for you to respond you probably don’t ask how much the mansion cost, where he got his money, did he build it himself or hire a contractor, use new or recycled materials, how long it took to build or how long it will last. Not that those aren’t interesting questions for another day. A more appropriate response would be to simply say “thank you” and enjoy the mansion that is your new home.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” raises lots of interesting and valid questions but our first response should be a simple “thank you, God” and enjoy the heavens and earth that is our home.

God

- 1. These first encouraging words start with God.** In just ten words we learn so much about him.
- 2. God is eternal. He is before the beginning.** The “beginning” is neither defined nor dated but whenever it was must have been a very long time ago. Perhaps it was the beginning of time or the beginning of the universe or some other beginning we cannot even imagine. Before that beginning, whenever it was, God was there. He predates time and history.
- 3. God created.** The Hebrew verb translated “create” is used numerous other times later in the Bible but *always* has the same subject: God. Artists draw. Architects design. Surgeons repair. But, only God creates.
Story: There is a story about an imaginary conversation between God and two researchers who worked on cloning animals and humans. They challenged God to a human-making contest and said, “We’ll do it the way you did it.” They reached down and grabbed a handful of dirt from the ground. God interrupted them and said, “Hold it—you get your own dirt.”

The point is that when God created he made everything out of nothing. In Latin the words are *ex nihilo*. This means that however God did it, he designed everything that is and is in the universe (heavens) and earth. He is astonishingly creative, has a great sense of humor and is a brilliant scientist and a magnificent artist.

When we look at the heavens we are seeing the handiwork of God. Recently I’ve worked on a project with Jennifer Wiseman, a prominent astrophysicist with a PhD from Harvard, who works for NASA and is a leader on the Hubble Telescope. She describes the universe and shows pictures that are beyond my words to describe. And, as a Christian, she believes in the God of Genesis 1:1.

My own reading on God’s heavens stretches my mind until it hurts. The observable universe from Earth has a radius of 46 billion light years. Our Milky Way Galaxy is roughly 100,000 light years in diameter. Our nearest sister galaxy, the Andromeda Galaxy, is about 2.5 million light years away. There are probably around 100 billion galaxies in our observable universe. Dwarf galaxies have as few as ten million stars but giant galaxies range up to one trillion stars. Astronomers differ in their estimates of the total number of stars in our observable universe—from one sextillion to as many as 300 sextillion stars.

4. ***“In the beginning God created the heavens....”*** And whatever your count the numbers are big, and God is bigger. God is brilliant, creative, powerful. He is a genius beyond our wildest estimates of intellect.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” By size comparison, we’re not much. We are like a subatomic speck compared to God’s universe but he created our home planet and all that is on it (including us). 2010 marked the end of a ten-year project called the *Census of Marine Life* during which scientists from 80 nations discovered 6000 previously unknown species bringing the current total to around 250,000 identified. But, marine biologists have explored only about 20% of the ocean’s volume. From mammoth whales to 600 year old tube worms. Some are magnificently gorgeous and others are downright bizarre looking. *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”*

Us

1. **And what does all this mean to us?** Certainly it means that I should take care of God’s creation—not primarily for earth’s sake but for God’s sake. Just as I would take good care of your car or house so I want to take good care of God’s creation. **Am I concerned about the threat of nuclear explosions or environmental degradations of God’s creation?** I am. I care. But, I also have deep confidence that God is even more committed than I am. I believe that he holds us responsible and that he holds our sinful human race back from the worst we can and would do to God’s masterpiece.
2. **The reason Genesis 1:1 is so encouraging is because it is about God and what he can and does do.** The God who created the heavens and the earth can deal with any problem we ever face. He is the God to whom we can run when scared, the God who will love us when we are discouraged and the God who can come up with a solution to our dilemmas that we would never figure out for ourselves.

3. King David got it right in Psalm 8

*O Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.
When I consider 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,
the son of man that you care for him?
You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
O Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

4. The God who created the heavens and the earth also created us. He didn't make us a little higher than all the other animals on earth; he made us a little lower than the angels and heavenly beings. This great God loves us, owns us and is committed to us. He is the God of everywhere and everything and we can trust him fully.

5. Be encouraged: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

Conclusion

1. You may know the words of a spiritual written by an American soldier during World War II. Obie Philpot was a Cherokee Indian. His song is the only gospel song to ever reach #1 on Billboard's pop singles chart. The words express the encouragement of Genesis 1:1.

*He's got the whole world in His hands
He's got the itty bitty baby in His hands
He's got a-you and me brother in His hands
He's got a-you and me sister in His hands
He's got the whole world in His hands*

2. I wish I could sing it for you the way gospel singer Mahalia Jackson used to sing it. When she died almost 40 years ago (1911-1972) she was considered one of the greatest singers in America. She was offered lots of money and even more fame to record secular songs but she always refused. The only songs she would sing and record were songs of faith . . . like, “He's Got the Whole World in His Hands.”

3. Video Clip (3 minutes): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UEH7jyt1eoo>