

# KNOW GOD'S HEART

## GROUP STUDY 1



### Introduction

Begin by asking a question: *Is showing compassion and caring for those in need solely a Christian thing?*  
[Solicit answers.]

*If it isn't just a Christian thing, would you say that there is a difference between a youth mission trip and a school service project? Is there a difference between what Mother Teresa did and what modern humanitarians, like Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, are doing?*

*Through these sessions, I hope we will be able to clearly see what makes a Christian response to poverty and hunger. To begin with, I want to make sure that we understand why God desires for us to care for the poor and those in need. Why does it matter to Him?*

### Lesson

Start from the very beginning, Genesis 1:26-28.  
[Read text.]

#### Context of Genesis 1

- God created time, seasons, vegetation, animals, etc.
- He set the world in order, and then He created man in His image.

Ask: *What does it mean to be created in God's image? What does that image look like?*

[A good visual would be to project or pass around several pictures of different faces — from various ethnicities, countries, ages, stages of life. You could ask: *Which of these resembles the image of God the most?*]

Explain that in the ancient Near Eastern world of the Old Testament, a ruler would set up an image of himself to represent his sovereign reign and presence, as a way to say, "I'm here and I'm watching! I still reign over this place." That is similar to what God initiates in the world He has just created.

God creates Adam in His image to remind the world that God is the One Who is ruling. In fact, God's work would be accomplished through the image-bearer! He is to demonstrate what it means to be in a loving relationship with the Creator. By the way God would bless his life, all the world and all of creation would know what kind of God has created the world simply by looking at the way God related to His own image-bearer.

Being made in God's image doesn't mean taking God's place. Rather, there are two aspects of what it means to be made in God's image:

1. Essence – Being made in God's image means we have reason, self-awareness (we process what we're feeling and why), creativity and appreciation for beauty (for no other reason than beauty itself). We're relational — created to be in community like God. In fact, the most important aspect of the image of God is that we have the capacity to be like Him in justice, goodness and love.

Most of us have heard this before, but there's more to being made in God's image. It's in the passage we just read. God creates Adam and Eve in His image, and then gives them a command: Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, have dominion (verse 28).

2. Functional – Adam is to name the animals in Genesis 2. The rabbis interpreted this act as ruling over them (Genesis 17:4). In fact, they said Adam expressed the image of God by naming the animals. They were to RULE and SUBDUE. That is, they were to cultivate the world, to make something of it. When you rule, you bring some order or law. When you subdue, you give order to something wild. Adam and Eve were to do this on God's behalf. This is part of what it means to be made in God's image.

And we all bear this image!

- We have the desire to be relational; this is why loneliness is one of the worst feelings.
- We are called to make something of this world, to interact with our world, and to be creative within it. Examples include music, art and sports. We hone our skills, develop our crafts. Why? In order to make something of the world.
- We are created to be moral beings. Morality is not just something we grew up with or how we were raised. Every culture has a notion of morality.
- We are created to steward this creation well — to rule over it.

This image status isn't just given to a few elite (like the kings in the Old Testament world), but to all of humanity. Therefore:

- Every human has worth and dignity because each bears the image of God.
- Every human has a responsibility and a mission in the world as an image-bearer.

And here's the real problem with the way the world is: If we are all created in God's image, but the resources to meaningfully express that image are not evenly distributed because some of those image-bearers are not sharing or are hoarding, then how could God be pleased?

The book *When Helping Hurts* by Brian Fikkert and Steve Corbett features a series of interviews by the World Bank. People in poverty are asked, "What does it mean to be poor?"

*Ask: How would you respond to that question?*

[Solicit some answers. You may want to have someone write the answers so everyone can see. Then read some of the responses from Fikkert and Corbett's book, which follow.]

"For a poor person everything is terrible — illness, humiliation, shame. We are cripples; we are afraid of everything; we depend on everyone. No one needs us. We are like garbage that everyone wants to get rid of."  
– Moldova

"When I don't have any [food to bring my family], I borrow, mainly from neighbors and friends. I feel ashamed standing before my children when I have nothing to help and feed the family." – Guinea-Bissau

"We cannot afford to invite anyone to our house and we feel uncomfortable visiting others without bringing a present. The lack of [relationships] leaves one depressed, creates a constant feeling of unhappiness, and a sense of low self-esteem." – Latvia

"I have a feeling of powerlessness and an inability to make myself heard." – Cameroon

*Ask: How did we define poverty?* [Usually we define it as material — no money, home, food, etc.]

*How did "the poor" define poverty?* [SHAME and ISOLATION. In essence, a loss of dignity. This is the difference between a Christian concern for the poor and hungry and a non-Christian concern. Our concern isn't just based on how poor someone is compared with us; it's based on what we believe every human should be. The Christian concern recognizes dignity in someone because of who they are — IMAGE-BEARERS — not because of what situation they are in.]

[Add an illustration or closing story about someone whom you've met who was vulnerable and "poor." The point of the story should be about how you saw dignity in them (or a lack thereof). An example follows.]

The story is told of meeting Charles from South Carolina in the streets of Washington, D.C. Charles was asked, "What is the hardest thing about being human?" He responded, "The hardest thing about being homeless and poor is not the hunger or dirt. It's the fact that people walk by you in the street without even making eye contact, pretending that you don't even exist. They pay more attention to a parking meter or streetlight than they do me." It's the shame, the lack of dignity or worth. You're so worthless you don't even exist in their eyes.

*Is [insert name of someone in group] made in the image of God? If he/she is, then does he/she have a right to be acknowledged? Does he/she have a right to food? Shelter? Education so that he/she can make something of the world? So that he/she can contribute to society?*

*Does an Asian child, or African, or Latino, have rights to clean water, food, clothing, education? Care, nurture and encouragement to dream? Do they have a right to know that God has created them in His image?*

God's image-bearers are so important to Him that He sent Jesus Christ, the perfect image of God, to live among us. [Read Colossians 1:11-15. If you want, read all the way to verse 20.]

Jesus, as the image of God, came, suffered and died to make it possible for image-bearers like you and me, and the poorest of the poor, to experience the full benefits of what it means to be created in His image.

### **In Summary**

If we are created in the image of God, then part of that function is to go out and make something of the world — to care for it, even if that includes caring for other image-bearers whose opportunity and rights have been taken away from them.

The poor are created in the image of God and they have a purpose to fulfill as image-bearers. This is the heart of God: that they should be in relationship, have dignity, and make something of the world. This is why we should be informed about extreme global poverty. We should invite other image-bearers who may or may not know God to join us. Because God desires every human on this planet, whom He has made in His image, to know Him through THE image-bearer, Jesus, and to carry out the mission that He has for each of them in the world.

### **Small Group Questions**

1. What does it mean to be made in the image of God? How do you feel that YOU bear the image of God?
2. After this discussion, how would you define poverty? Is it different from how you defined it before?
3. Why does God care about the poor? We know that He loves all of us, but given tonight's talk, what does the image of God have to do with God caring for the poor?
4. What are you feeling in response to everything you heard? What does it make you want to do or not do?