

Laying Foundations

Phase II

Sample

Understanding People

Pocket Principles[®]
and Guided Discussions

For Students

Understanding People, Pocket Principles® and Guided Discussions, For Students

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NOTE: In an effort to recognize that both men and women are co-heirs of God's grace, we have chosen to use alternating gender pronouns in this document. However, we do recognize and embrace gender-specific roles in Scripture.

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A Welcome from WDA's President

Worldwide Discipleship Association, Inc.

Hello Friend!

Let me congratulate you on your decision to learn more about Jesus Christ and what it means to follow Him. There is nothing more important or more rewarding than the decision to follow Him and then to grow as a Christian.

These studies will help you get started on your journey with Christ or encourage and instruct you if you are already on this exciting journey. We in WDA want to help you grow and become all you can be in Christ Jesus!

My prayer and confident belief is that "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6) so that He is able "to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy." (Jude 1:24) To Him be glory and praise!

May God richly bless you as you strive to grow in Him.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bob Dukes', with a stylized, cursive script.

Bob Dukes
President, Worldwide Discipleship Association
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Sample

Understanding People

Table of Contents: Student

#1	Created In The Image Of God
1	Pocket Principle™
5	Guided Discussion
#2	The Uniqueness Of Each Person
8	Pocket Principle™
11	Guided Discussion
#3	The Impact Of The Fall
14	Pocket Principle™
17	Guided Discussion
#4	Reversing The Effects Of The Fall
20	Pocket Principle™
23	Guided Discussion
#5	Experiencing The Benefits Of Knowing Christ
26	Pocket Principle™
30	Guided Discussion
#6	Created With Needs
34	Pocket Principle™
37	Guided Discussion
#7	Getting Needs Met
40	Pocket Principle™
44	Guided Discussion
#8	Created With Emotions
48	Pocket Principle™
52	Guided Discussion
#9	Understanding Emotional Problems
56	Pocket Principle™
60	Exhibit: Causes And Symptoms Of Emotional Problems
63	Guided Discussion
#10	Healing From Emotional Problems
69	Pocket Principle™
74	Exhibit: Evaluating And Dealing With Emotional Problems
75	Exhibit: Understanding The Healing Process
76	Exhibit: Seeking Outside Help To Deal With Emotional Problems
77	Guided Discussion
82	What's Next?
83	Links
84	About WDA

Sample

Created In The Image Of God

Have you ever felt confused and frustrated by the behavior of another person? Or been confused by your own behavior? “Why did I say that?” “Why did I do that?” Understanding people—both ourselves and others—is important to our own personal growth and to our ability to impact the lives of others. This series of Pocket Principles® is designed to help us begin the process of understanding people. We begin with several benefits that understanding people can bring us.

First, understanding people helps us to understand what motivates their behavior. When God created humanity, He created us incomplete, and this incompleteness drives people to try to get their needs met. For example, one of the greatest needs all of us have is for value and worth. We see this need revealed in the ways people seek acceptance, recognition, and approval. From the child’s attention-seeking to an adult’s basic insecurity, this need is evident. Driven by this need, a child will often act out to get negative attention which is preferable to being ignored. An adult will make all kinds of sacrifices to win some positive feedback and may even demand it from others. Even if we deny our needs, we still are driven by them, and our words and actions betray us.

Second, we need to understand people so we can be sensitive to them. The more we understand people, their struggles and needs, the more we can come along side them in helpful, significant ways, communicate their “specialness” and show them their need for God and spiritual growth.

A third reason to understand people is to correct inadequate views of humanity. There are many wrong views of mankind both outside of Christianity and within. Our understanding of people must be derived from the Bible. What does God say about mankind? Since God created us, He knows even more about us than we do about ourselves. In the Pocket Principles® that follow we will explore how God has created us, the effect of the Fall of mankind and the restorative ministry of Christ. In this Pocket Principle™ we will begin to define and understand what it means to be made in the image of God.

Our understanding of people must be derived from the Bible. What does God say about mankind?

BIBLICAL TEACHING ABOUT THE IMAGE OF GOD IN MANKIND

Scripture makes many clear statements about the image of God in mankind. The first one is found in Genesis 1:27.

*So God created mankind in His own image,
in the image of God He created them,
male and female He created them.*

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Although it seems so, this passage is not redundant. The repetition is a Hebrew expression designed to communicate emphasis and build to a climax. In fact, everything in the creation account builds to a climax: God creates something, steps back from it, admires it and pronounces it “good.” He does this over and over until He comes to the creation of humanity.

God saved the best for last. It was as if He said, “Okay, what We have done so far is pretty good, but now We need to do something that is even more spectacular. Let’s create humans. We need to make them greater than everything else in all of the universe. Let’s do that by creating them in Our image. Let’s make them like Us.”

Humanity was God’s masterpiece, His high point, the climax of creation. Indeed, everything else was made for humans, not God. The rest of creation was to be the place where people would dwell and live and move. People were to rule over, maintain and develop God’s creation. Though all other parts of creation bear God’s mark and design, only humanity bears His image.

Often Christians don’t appreciate the unique place that God has given them.

Psalm 8:3-7 puts it this way:

*When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which You have set in place,
what is mankind that You are mindful of them,
human beings that You care for them?*

*You made them a little lower than “elohim”
and crowned them with glory and honor.
You made them rulers over the works of Your hands;
You put everything under their feet:
all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.*

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Christians may become too focused on the problem of sin and lose sight of the dignity of mankind. While it is true that all humans, including those who are believers, have an ongoing serious problem with sin, it is also true that all humanity, including nonbelievers, have been created in God’s image. Psalm 8 tells us that mankind was made just a little lower than “elohim.” The Hebrew word “elohim” is the name of God used to reveal His might and sovereignty. It is probably best to understand this passage to be saying that God created humanity just a little lower than Himself. Out of all of creation, humans are the only ones who reflect God’s image. There is none other like them.

THE MEANING OF THE IMAGE OF GOD IN MANKIND

Being made in God's image means that we are like God in many ways, but not in all ways. We are like Him in that we have a personality, an intellect, a will and emotions. We are also creative, as He is. Look around and see what humans have done in architecture, art, medicine, science, and technology. We are advancing in our understanding and in our ability to control the world we live in because God has given us the ability to learn, invent and create, to plan and carry out those plans. We communicate with complex, abstract language. No other animal is able to do this, only humans. Humanity alone bears God's image.

God's image is shown in still other ways. Because God is the standard of right and wrong, all people have an inner sense of right and wrong, a moral compass of sorts, a conscience (Romans 2:14-15). People have a spiritual dimension so we are able to have a relationship with God. We have an innate desire to worship God, although at times it may be misdirected toward false gods (Romans 1:21-23). We have deep longings for a better world, deeper relationships and a more meaningful life. We are capable of having significant relationships and joining with others to do incredible feats (like putting a man on the moon) and creating almost unimaginable objects (such as a space station). Humans reflect God more than any other created being.

Mankind was
God's masterpiece,
His high point, the
climax of creation.

THE RESTORATION OF THE IMAGE OF GOD IN HUMANITY

The Fall of humanity damaged the image of God in people. Although God's image was marred, it was not destroyed (James 3:9). Humanity is like a classic car that has deteriorated, that seems like a piece of junk. It is rusted, dented and broken. It is easy to discount it as something that needs to be discarded. But it is not a piece of junk. It is a classic car desperately in need of restoration. This is how it is with humanity. God's image in them is marred, but they are image-bearers who are desperately in need of restoration.

God sent Christ into the world not just to win our salvation but to restore what has been lost. The goal of the Christian life is to become like Christ. Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3). So to become like Christ is to restore the image of God in fallen people. This is God's goal, His commitment to us.

Although God is renewing us on the inside (our spiritual selves), the outside (our physical selves) is increasingly wasting away (II Corinthians 4:16). This wasting away of the outside will eventually cause us to die physically. In eternity God

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will instantly finish the work on the inside, and when Jesus returns to earth, He will also restore the outside. We will have a new body fashioned after Christ's resurrection body that will be suited for the new world that God will create.

So to become like Christ
is to restore the image
of God in fallen people.
This is God's goal, His
commitment to us.

In light of what it means to be created in the image of God, we should celebrate the majesty of mankind. Mankind is God's supreme creation. All people, whether believers or nonbelievers, are created with great worth because they are created in the image of God. It is that image that makes the weak, the downtrodden, the defenseless, the old and the disabled significant. We cannot reject them as the world often does because as image-bearers they reflect Him and represent Him in this world.

While God's image in humanity gives us value, it does not give us salvation. Although all humans were created for eternal life, no one is guaranteed eternal life. It is only as a person comes to a saving faith in Jesus Christ that she receives eternal life and Christ begins to restore God's image in her. As God's image is restored, the person begins to be changed from the inside out. She begins the process of becoming more like Christ and is enabled by God's power and guidance to use her abilities to glorify God and advance His Kingdom. Humanity was created for great things but our true and full purpose cannot be realized without God. The great tragedy of hell is that some who were created in God's image and therefore were destined for great things will spend eternity separated from Him.

There are many significant implications of being created in God's image.

- It should bring forth praise to God for the unique place and abilities that God has given mankind.
- All people have worth and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.
- It removes all basis for racism or feelings of superiority or inferiority.
- It is the basis for saying that only God has the right to take a life or prescribe when a life should be taken.
- It is the only true basis for having a high view of mankind.
- It provides a basis for the argument that people should play an important role in living the Christian life (Colossians 1:28,29; Philippians 2:12,13), as opposed to God doing it all.

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Created In The Image Of God

GOAL:

For a disciple to be amazed and appreciative that God has created all people in His image.

GETTING STARTED:

If a person sees himself as “unable to do anything right,” how might this affect the way he lives his life?

STUDYING TOGETHER:

Read Genesis 1:26-28.

Scripture doesn't explicitly define the “image of God in mankind,” but we do know that when the God of the universe entrusted His image to human beings, He gave us incredible worth. Historically, the image of God in mankind has been understood to mean that humans have certain capacities that are like God's.

1. What are some of these capacities?
2. James 3:9 makes it clear that all people are made in the image of God, believers and non-believers. What are some indications in our society that people, even sinful people, were created in the image of God?

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3. According to verse 28 in Genesis 1 what is mankind's relationship to nature, specifically to animals?
4. What do you think are some of the differences between humans and animals?
5. What is the significance of God making both male and female in His image?

Read Psalm 8:4-8.

6. What place did God give mankind in the creation order?
7. What did God crown mankind with?

What do you think that means?

LOOKING AT REAL LIFE:

Earlier we said, "we do know that when the God of the universe entrusted His image to human beings, He gave us incredible worth."

8. What are some of the implications of this?
9. How should this affect a believer's life?

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10. Discuss some ways you see the likeness of God in others:

In their conversation:

In their family life:

In their interaction with friends and co-workers:

In their hobbies:

In their accomplishments:

LOOKING AT MY LIFE:

Psalm 8 exalts God. We can praise and worship Him by praying this Scripture back to Him.

"O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" Psalm 8:9 (NIV)

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