

Why Are We Here?



Bird's Eye View of Lesson

The story of creation describes the process of human birth. Every person alive is created in the image and likeness of God. It is the Lord's deepest wish that people may experience a second birth—the birth of their spirits—introducing them into heavenly life. The life of heaven is the life that the Lord intends for each person. It is a life of useful service, linked to the lives of others, in the Lord. The Lord leads us to find our own place in the heavenly network that He calls the Grand Man.

Readings from the Word

Have you ever wondered why you have been created? Our earthly human life span is limited by our bodily health. We can't live here forever! So what does God intend for us?

Creation

The Word begins with the story of the seven days of creation. At first the earth is without form and empty. Each day the earth is gradually formed and filled with newly created plants, marine life, birds and animals. On the sixth day, the Lord completes creation by making humankind, His crowning work.

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:27-28).

The creation process continues today as each human being is lovingly created by the Lord, in His image.

What Is Man?

The Psalmist asks "What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?" (Psalm 8:3-4). Many people wonder about this. The Lord has a Divine purpose for each human being that He forms. The Psalmist says to the Lord:

Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.
And in Your book they all were written,
The days fashioned for me,
When as yet there were none of them (Psalm 139:16).

The Lord has a purpose for each person's life, and He sees this before we are even born.



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Born of the Spirit

Birth brings us into the natural world, but this is just one aspect of our lives. Our bodies act as containers for our spirits. They enable us to put into action what we think and love, to express the life of our spirit. To become fully human we must experience a second birth.

“Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:5-8).

Our second birth is a birth into the heavenly life that the Lord intends for every person. This is the purpose of our creation.

Born for Heaven

What is heavenly life? We experience heavenly life when we are linked together with others in the Lord, leading lives of useful activity. The Lord says,

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples” (see John 15:5-8).

Living in the Lord involves loving Him and doing what He teaches. The fruits of this choice are acts of useful service to others. This is heaven.

Linked with Others in the Lord

Just as each cell in our physical body is joined with other cells to form organs, systems, and an entire human being, so individuals working for a common purpose in groups and communities form the whole of heaven. In the Lord’s eyes heaven is a person on the grand scale, a Grand Man (see *Earths in the Universe* 9).

The entire heaven resembles one human being. Since the angels know that all the heavens with their societies resemble one person they therefore call heaven the Grand and Divine Man (see *Heaven and Hell* 59).

Because heaven as a whole and in part, from the Lord’s Divine Human, reflects a human being, the angels say that they are in the Lord; and some say that they are in His body, meaning that they are in the good of His love (*Heaven and Hell* 81).

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The Lord creates each of us for our own special place in heaven where we can find connection with others like a cell in the Divine body.

Although forming heaven out of people is the continual design of the Divine Providence, its inmost design is that a person may be in this or that place in heaven, or in this or that place in the Divine Heavenly Man; for in this way he is in the Lord. This happens only with those whom the Lord can lead to heaven; and as the Lord foresees this, He also provides continually that a person may become like this. For in this way everyone who allows himself to be led to heaven is prepared for his own place in heaven (see *Divine Providence* 67).

In heaven we will live not only for ourselves, but for the sake of other people with whom we share heavenly community.

OPTIONAL READING

We are not born for our own sake; we are born for the sake of others. That is, we are not born to live for ourselves alone, we are born to live for others. Otherwise society would not hold together and there would be no good in it (see *True Christianity* 406).

We read that we are to love the Lord God above all things, and our neighbor as ourselves (Luke 10:27). To love our neighbor as ourselves means not despising our neighbors in comparison with ourselves. It means treating them justly and not judging them wrongfully. The law of goodwill pronounced and given by the Lord Himself is this: Whatever you want people to do to you, do likewise for them. This is the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31,32) This is how people who love heaven love their neighbor. People who love the world, however, love their neighbor on a worldly basis for a worldly benefit. People who love themselves love their neighbor in a selfish way for a selfish benefit (*True Christianity* 411).



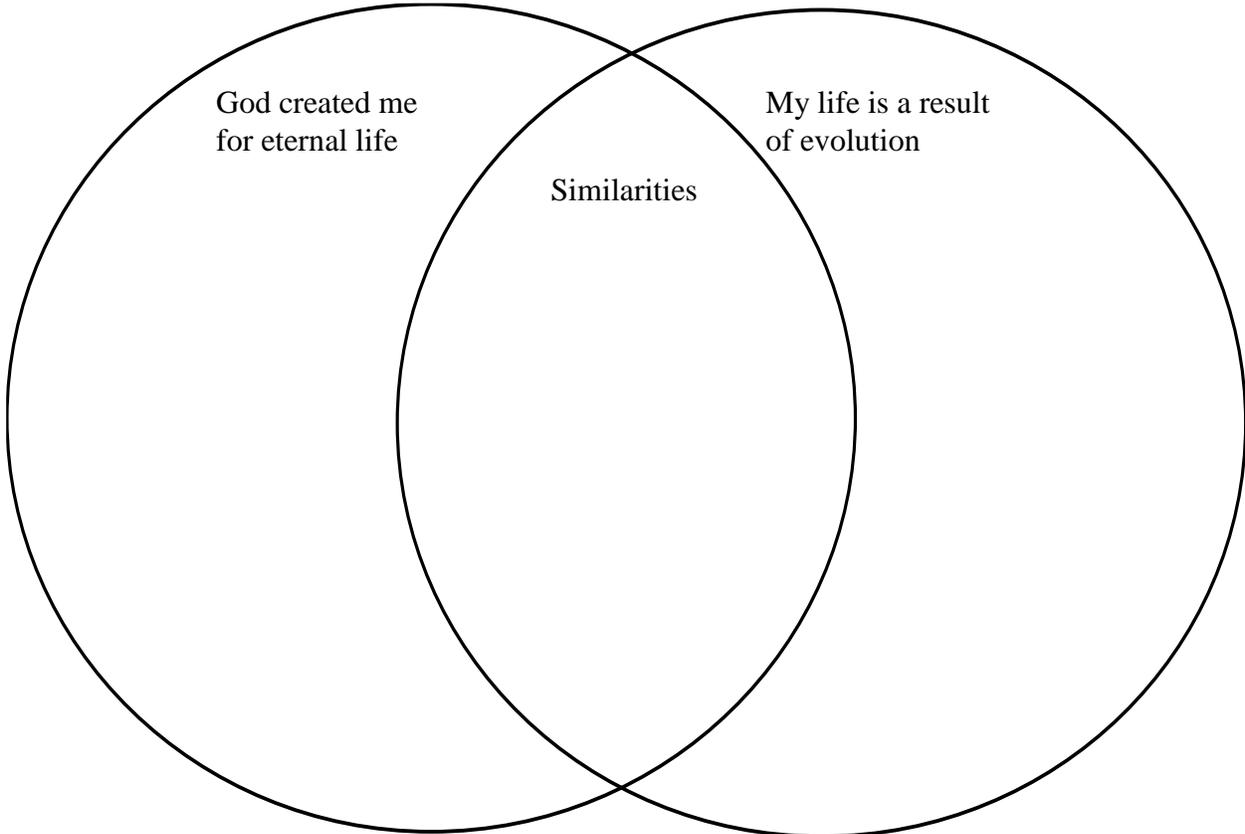
Focus Points

1. What do you think the following words from Psalm 139 mean?

*Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.
And in Your book they all were written,
The days fashioned for me,
When as yet there were none of them.*

- God knew the details of my life before I was born. God plans what my life will be like. God has a book of life, and what I do is written there. God foresaw that I would be born and guides my choices.

2. Compare the following statements: *God created me for eternal life in heaven* and *My life is a result of evolution*.



3. In what ways do these two opinions make a difference to a person's attitude towards life?

Activity 1

God

Excerpted from "From the Top of the Yardstick" by Donnette Alfelt
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I can't remember now at what point or points I have doubted the existence of God, but there were times. It might have been high school or during a difficult time later on. What a wonderful gift—this ability to doubt. He is all powerful and yet He leaves us in freedom to love and believe what we choose.

Some demand proof of a God even though overwhelming evidence surrounds us. To me this is like a fish swimming in the lake looking for water. I can no longer doubt God because nothing would make sense to me without Him.

Fred Hoyle, who coined the word "big bang," said the chance that higher life forms might have emerged by chance is comparable with the chance that "a tornado sweeping through a junkyard might assemble a Boeing 747 from the material therein."

When I was a child we used to play this game: Choose any material object you own, such as the shoes you are wearing or the pencil you are holding. The object of the game is to trace how many people were involved in designing, producing and making it possible for you to have those shoes or anything else. The more we played this, the more we realized we couldn't count them all. You would need to include not only the original designer and those who taught him or her, but also those that invented or produced the paper and ink, the computer or other tools he or she used. Someone killed the animal the leather came from, or produced the plastic, or chopped down the tree for the pencil. Someone designed and someone produced the boxes they were shipped in. Someone drove the truck and put them on the shelves. Someone sold them to you using a cash register designed by someone else, *etc.* But of course it all goes back to God, who supplied the talents and raw material.

What has become clear to me is that no matter how we doubt, question or discount God, He continues to love and guide us. He does this with great power while preserving our precious freedom by His gentleness. His greatest desire is our eternal happiness, so He asks us to follow Him, not for His sake, but for ours.

Write or Debate

Each person or group member should write about or be prepared to debate both of the following statements:

1. A loving God created and cares for us.
2. There is no God.

Follow Up

What have you learned about God and His leading?
Why might people might feel there is no God?



Wonder

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,
What is man that You are mindful of him,
And the son of man that You visit him?
(Psalm 8:3-4)

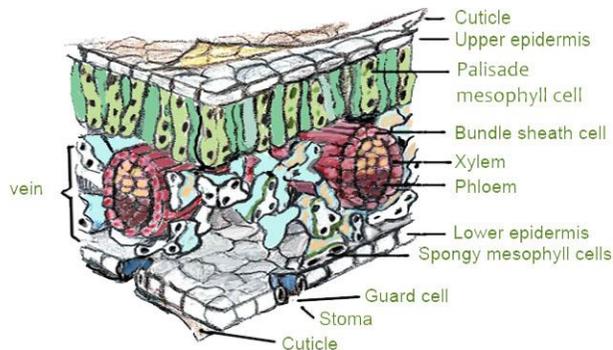
Use one of the following ideas as a springboard to thinking about the wonders of creation.

Look at a Leaf

Take a leaf from a tree, outdoor or household plant and examine it closely with your eyes. Look for things like vein patterns, hairs, differences between the upper and under sides.

- What does a leaf do for a plant?
- What does it do for you?

Now take a closer look through a hand lens or a microscope. If you had a very powerful microscope, you might see something like this.



1. How can scientific inquiry serve our thinking?
2. Is it possible to see spiritual realities in the natural world by using the scientific method?
3. Is it possible to see the Lord's wisdom in creation?

Bird Migration

Here are some facts that may amaze you!

- The arctic tern flies a phenomenal round trip that can be as long as 20,000 miles per year, from the Arctic to the Antarctic and back.
 - Bar-headed geese have been recorded flying across the Himalayas at 29,000 feet.
 - Some birds have figured out how to ride “thermals”—updrafts of air caused by solar heating, to take a free ride high into the sky.
1. Can facts like this help scientists believe that God exists?
 2. Do these facts confirm or deny that God creates and cares for everything?
 3. In what ways can we use scientific facts to see the Lord's wisdom in action?

Activity 3

How Angels Lead and Protect Us



The angels through whom the Lord leads and also protects a person are near his head. The angels:

- ✓ impart charity and faith
- ✓ notice the direction in which the person's delights turn
- ✓ modify and bend those delights towards what is good, so far as they can do so while keeping a person in freedom.

The angels activate good and truth with a person to balance evils and falsities activated by the evil spirits. As a result the person is in the middle and is not conscious of the evil or of the good. The person is in freedom to turn towards one or towards the other.

Angels from the Lord use these methods to lead and protect a person, doing so every instant and fraction of an instant.

If the angels were to let up merely for a single moment the person would be plunged into evil from which after that he cannot possibly be brought out.

The angels are motivated to do all this by a love they receive from the Lord, for nothing gives them greater delight and happiness than to remove evils from a person and lead him to heaven.

Scarcely anyone believes the Lord has that kind of concern for a person, a constant concern lasting from the very beginning of a person's existence to the final moment of his life, and for evermore after that.

(Adapted from *Arcana Coelestia* 5992)

True or False?

Circle T or F. Discuss your answers with the group.

1. Angels want to lead us toward what is good and protect us from what is evil. T F
2. Nothing gives the angels greater happiness than removing evils from people and leading them to heaven. T F
3. The Lord takes care of us when the angels can no longer help us. T F
4. Angels try to lead us toward what is good, "bending" our delights. T F
5. Angels want to "win us over" to being good, and our freedom is not important to them. T F
6. The angels help keep us in equilibrium so that we are free to choose between good and evil. T F
7. Even if the angels weren't caring for us constantly, we would be fine, because we don't need their help. T F
8. Angels lead us through our delights, maximizing every tendency toward good. T F
9. Freedom is being able to choose between what is evil and what is good. T F
10. We are aware of the angels' efforts to lead us toward good and of evil spirits efforts to lead us toward evil. T F

Taking It Home



Here are two activities that can help you bring this lesson into your life.

I Trust the Lord to...

Think about the teaching that the Lord is most concerned with our *eternal* welfare. Write down some of the things that you trust Him to do so that you may be led to heavenly happiness.

For example: "I trust that the Lord wants to lead me to heaven."

"I trust that the Lord loves me and is caring for me."

"I trust that the Lord will provide everything necessary for my eternal welfare."

Quotation Cards

Take one quotation each day and think about how it applies to your life.

**The Lord turns Himself
to those who trust in Him.**

Psalm 37:3

**Those who trust in the Divine are not
anxious, let alone worried, when they
give thought to the morrow.**

see *Arcana Coelestia* 8455

**Those in the stream of providence are
people who trust in the Divine and
ascribe everything to Him.**

see *Arcana Coelestia* 8478:4

**He who trusts in the Lord,
Mercy shall surround him.**

Psalm 32:10

**Commit your way to the Lord,
Trust also in Him,
And He shall bring it to pass...**

Psalm 37:5

**Peace hold within itself trust in the
Lord, the trust that He governs all
things, and that He leads towards an
end that is good.**

see *Arcana Coelestia* 8544

**For those who trust in the Divine, all
things are moving towards an
everlasting state of happiness, no
matter what happens to them.**

see *Arcana Coelestia* 8478:3

**Those who trust in the Divine, remain
even-tempered whether or not they
realize their desires and do not grieve
over loss. They are content with their
lot.**

see *Arcana Coelestia* 8478:3

Further Reading

The Divine Providence

A Chapel Talk by the Rev. Douglas Taylor

How is the Lord involved in our world? How does He, in fact, govern it? How does He provide what is needed? These are important questions for us to consider. After all, how can we cooperate with the Lord unless we know how He operates, how He works?

The way the Lord rules and provides—His Providence—is usually called the Divine Providence. The Divine Providence means the rule or government of the Divine love and wisdom. Just as the Lord, when He created the universe acted from His Divine love by means of His Divine wisdom, so He maintains His creation in a state of order from His Divine love by means of His Divine wisdom. What His Divine love intends to do, His Divine wisdom provides the means of doing. The Lord provides what is needed to keep all that He has created in order, and what is needed to restore order when disorder appears on the scene.

Now, have you ever thought of this? We human beings are the only cause of disorder. We are the only ones of the Lord's creatures who can get out of order. All the lower orders of the Creator's creatures are permanently in the order of their life, the order or pattern into which they were created. All plants and animals, for example, live and act according to the order or pattern of their genus and species. We human beings *alone* are free to depart from the order of life intended for us.

What Is the Lord's Goal for Us?

And what is the order of life intended for us human beings? It is that we should love the Lord first and our neighbor as ourselves. The two great commandments show us how to be truly human. But, unlike the plants and animals, we can get out of that order and bring in disorder—as we know all too well! For this reason the Lord has to work to provide what is needed to keep us in order, and to restore us to order when we depart from it. So it is that the Divine Providence is directed above all to the human race, and to other things for the sake of the human race. In fact, the whole end or goal that the Lord has in view is a heaven made up from the human race. The Lord has this in mind in everything that He does.

We can understand this better if only we consider what we mean when we say that the Lord is love itself and wisdom itself. There are three characteristics of the Divine love: it wills that there be others outside of itself, who have nothing of Divinity or Infinity; it strives to work in conjunction with those others outside of itself and not be at odds with them; and, finally, it wills to make them eternally happy. The Divine love is not content to make others happy temporarily or for a short time; it can be satisfied only when people are eternally happy or blessed.

On the other hand the Divine wisdom—or way of operating—supplies the *means* of there being others outside of the Divine who have no Divinity or Infinity; it provides the means of being conjoined with those others; and it provides the means of making them eternally happy. The Divine wisdom, then, is the way the Divine love works, the way it operates.

On the physical plane we can easily see hundreds of examples of the Divine love operating by means of its wisdom. The various ways the Lord's love works in nature are usually called the *laws* of nature, but they are really the Lord's laws on the plane of nature.

What Are Laws?

But what is a law? Is it not a description of the way something works? Isn't the law of gravity, for example, a description of what happens when objects fall? And isn't it the same with all the laws of physics? They are descriptions of the way things work.

How Are Spiritual Laws Like the Laws of the World?

But what seems to be a new idea to many people is this: that on the spiritual plane also, the Lord operates according to certain ways or laws. These are not mere rules; they are laws that are predictable and reliable. There are, in fact, *laws* of the Divine Providence—the Lord's love operates according to certain laws always. He has now described them for us in the Heavenly Doctrines for the New Church, so that we can cooperate intelligently with Him. These laws had to be revealed because apparently there are still many people who have the idea that the Lord's Providence is a changeable, thing; that He can be swayed from His path if we storm and besiege heaven with our much-speaking. The misfortunes that happen to us in this life can be either blessings or curses. It all depends, not on the experiences themselves, but on our attitude to them. If we look at disappointments, frustrating situations, failure (even seemingly endless failures) from a merely natural viewpoint, from the point of view of this world only, then, of course, they can only seem to be curses. But if we have the right attitude to them and think of them as means to our salvation from selfishness and worldliness, as opportunities to look to the Lord, the Eternal One, as ways and means by which the Lord can prepare us for heaven, then these things can be turned into blessings, and some *eternal* good can be brought forth out of them.

How Does the Lord Guard Our Freedom?

But just what this eternal good is in particular can be known only by the Lord. "My thoughts are not your thoughts—neither are your ways My ways says the Lord." We are not permitted to know the details of the Lord's ways, His footsteps, so to speak, because then we would without doubt rebel against them, and in this way pervert the workings of Providence. Besides, we would lose what the Lord never permits us to lose: our freedom, and a feeling of self-determination.

We Can See the Lord at Work by Looking at the Past

Yet we can see something of the workings of Providence, *after* the events have passed, by hindsight—if we look for them. You remember that Moses was not allowed to look upon the Lord face-to-face, but was only allowed to look at the back of the Lord. This illustrates another of the laws of Divine Providence—that we may see Providence only in the past, never in the present. We can all recall experiences and actions of ours that we wish had never happened, but our later regret and actual repentance, the change of our life, these are of the Divine Providence. They are the spiritual and eternal good that have come out of them. At the time we could see nothing of this, for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are the Lord's ways higher than our ways, and His thoughts higher than our thoughts.