

Ellen G. White Estate

MY JOURNEY TO LIFE

HUMAN NATURE

Finding Bible answers to questions of anthropology.

STEP 13 OF 28



My Journey to Life, Step 13

Foreword

My Journey to Life will give you the keys for finding peace of mind, harmony of body, and success in relationships. Every step will transform your outlook on life as you unpack each lesson. We pray they will help you to fall in love with the greatest Teacher this world has ever known. Together, let's walk the pathway step-by-step to a new life in Jesus.

Preface

You may have heard of a mid-life crisis, but a crisis in life can strike at any time. You might even encounter either one in your lifetime. If one occurs, you may ask several fundamental questions, such as, "Who am I?" What is my purpose? Am I living up to my potential? How will I ever handle this? To answer these questions, we must examine human origins as recorded in the Bible, the original design for humanity, and how our nature changed after Adam chose to sin.

Step Thirteen—Human Nature

Finding Bible answers to questions of anthropology. "Man and woman were made in the image of God with individuality and the power and freedom to think and to do. Though created free beings, each is an indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit, dependent upon God for life and breath and all else. When our first parents disobeyed God, they denied their dependence upon Him and fell from their high position. The image of God in them was marred and they became subject to death. Their descendants share this fallen nature and its consequences. They are born with weaknesses and tendencies to evil. But God in Christ reconciled the world to Himself and by His Spirit restores in penitent mortals the image of their Maker. Created for the glory of God, they are called to love Him and one another, and to care for their environment."
—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, p. 91

Bible Discovery: Genesis 1:26-28; 2:7, 15; 3; Psalm 8:4-8; 51:5, 10; 58:3; Jeremiah 17:9; Acts 17:24-28; Romans 5:12-17; 2 Corinthians 5:19, 20; Ephesians 2:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; 1 John 3:4; 4:7, 8, 11, 20

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 2, p. 88.2

1. How did humanity begin? The origin of the human race is found in divine council: "Let Us make man" (Genesis 1:26). The plural "Us" refers to the Godhead – God, the Father, God, the Son, and God, the Holy Spirit (See Step 8, *The Godhead*). On the sixth day of Creation week (see

Genesis 1 and 2), God sculpted the first man from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils, the breath of life. Realizing man's need for companionship, God put Adam to sleep, extracted one of his ribs, and made a woman. Both men and women were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), and both were given dominion over every living thing that moves on the earth.

Though many today believe that humans evolved from lower forms of animal life over time, this idea cannot be harmonized with the biblical record. That human beings have been subject to a process of degeneration is crucial to the nature of humanity (see: My Journey to Life: Step 12—*The Creation*). We are not just part of a cosmic machine; as individuals we were made in the image of God Himself, even with our gradual decline, we are precious in His sight!

Bible Discovery: Genesis 1:26-28; 2:18, 21, 22; Luke 3:38; Acts 17:26

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 15.1

2. What are the components of a living being? Scripture tells us that God “formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7). The union of earth's elements with God's breath of life resulted in a living being, or soul, a word some translations use for the Hebrew word, *nephesh*. We could write the equation like this:

Dust of the ground (earth's elements) + the breath of life = a living being.

The Greek word *psuche* (*psyche*) in the New Testament is like that of *nephesh* in the Old Testament. The *psuche* or *psyche* can die.

Note: The Bible says that man *became* a living soul. Nothing in the Creation account indicates that man *received* a soul—some kind of independent thing united with the human body. To be a living being requires both a body and the breath of God. When someone passes away, the breath of life returns to God (Ecclesiastes 12:7). This process could be compared to flipping off the switch to the television. When the electricity no longer flows to the electrical components, the television's sound, motion, and color cease and you have a blank screen.

The word translated “spirit” (*ruach* in the Old Testament; *pneuma* in the New Testament) can mean divine energy, breath, vitality, disposition, or seat of the emotions. When the *ruach* (here defined as breath) of God leaves the body, it is not an intelligent entity that exists outside of the body. It cannot praise God, see human activity, or maintain a conscious existence apart from the body. The phrase “immortal soul” does not occur in Scripture. The whole person lives and then the whole person dies, because only God is immortal (1 Timothy 6:16).

Bible Discovery: Job 13:14; 33:4; Psalm 6:5; 9:5, 6; Matthew 10:28; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Revelation 16:3

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, 18LtMs, *Manuscript 102*, 1903, par. 38

3. What was humanity's nature and purpose at Creation? Men and women were created in the image of God to reflect His character in thought and action. They were designed for close and loving fellowship with Him. God revealed Himself as the Father of humanity (Matthew 6:9), through Jesus, who is not ashamed to call us His brothers and sisters (Hebrews 2:11), and through the Spirit who takes humanity as His dwelling place (1 Corinthians 6:19).

Human beings were created with keen mental and spiritual gifts. We are part of the creation God pronounced it "very good." It's important to remember that we are part of God's "very good" creation when tempted to devalue ourselves.

We are also created to be stewards of the environment (Genesis 1:26). As God's representatives, we are accountable to Him for our actions in the natural world. We are to care diligently for all that was created lower than us, reflecting God's beneficent rule over the universe.

Bible Discovery: Genesis 1:31; Psalm 8:6-8; 19:1-4; 100:1-4; Ecclesiastes 7:29; Matthew 22:36-40

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 44.3-45.1

4. Since God is the Creator of humanity, is He also the Creator of evil? No. Scripture says God is holy (Isaiah 6:3) and by nature perfect and upright (Deuteronomy 32:4); therefore, He cannot be the originator of evil.

Rebellion marred the perfect atmosphere of heaven when Lucifer, a high-ranking created being in heaven, began to covet God's place. To take control of the universe, this fallen angel sowed seeds of discontent and jealousy among his fellow angels. He required their complete allegiance. The resulting heavenly conflict ended when Lucifer (Satan) and his angels were expelled out of heaven (Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:12-19; Revelation 12:4).

(See also My Journey to Life: Step 15 - *The Great Controversy*.)

Sin originated in humanity when Lucifer, now known as Satan, directed his entire legion of evil towards God's newly created Planet Earth. Despite living in a perfect world, loved, and cared for tenderly by their Creator, Adam and Eve fell prey to the enticements of Satan in the guise of a serpent. They allowed doubts about God's word to take root and chose sin above obedience.

Bible Discovery: Genesis 3; Job 34:10; Deuteronomy 32:4; Isaiah 6:3; 14:12-14; Revelation 12:7-9

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 49.1; *Education*, p. 25.2

5. How did human nature change when Adam and Eve sinned? At Creation, our first parents were given conditional immortality, dependent upon their obedience to God's Word. Because of their sin, their immortality changed to mortality. Disobedience led to death.

Adam and Eve severed their dependence on God when they failed to trust in His Word. This broken relationship brought a separation between God and humanity. Not only did Adam's nature change from sinless to sinful, but history reveals that Adam's descendants also share the sinfulness of his nature (Romans 5:12).

Bible Discovery: Genesis 2:17; 3:8, 22; 4:8, 23; Psalm 143:2; Isaiah 59:2, 3; Romans 3:23; 5:12-20

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 545.2; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 61.4

6. How can humans receive forgiveness of and freedom from sin? Biblical definitions of sin include: "the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4); a failure to act by anyone who "knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it" (James 4:17); and "whatever is not from faith" (Romans 14:23). The New Testament emphasizes the results of humanity's bondage to sin as innate sinful nature (Romans 3; Romans 7).

Because we have inherited Adam's sinful nature, we are unable to do anything about our sin and guilt ourselves. "But thank God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57). Because Jesus remained sinless in His humanity on earth and became obedient even to the point of death on the cross (Philippians 2:6-8), He earned the right to be our Redeemer (Isaiah 41:14), bearing the penalty for our sins on the cross of Calvary. While one man's trespass and disobedience led to condemnation, one Man's obedience and acts of righteousness brought life (Romans 5:18, 19). Hallelujah!

Bible Discovery: Genesis 3:1-6; Job 14:4; Psalm 143:2; Matthew 6:12; Romans 1:18-22; 6:23; Ephesians 2:3; Hebrews 2:15

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 18.1; *Education*, p. 15.2

7. How could evolutionary theory potentially impact the biblical view of human nature? Since Creation, Satan has sought to weaken confidence in the biblical account of the origins of the human race, the nature of humanity, and the introduction of sin and evil. Today, millions accept the theory of evolution, the "natural" or mechanistic view of humanity through eons of survival of the fittest, to be the template for human origins. Many Christians do not view the first chapters of Genesis as literal but as allegory or myth, even though such skepticism strikes at the roots of Christianity.

Really, Christianity and evolution are diametrically opposed to each other. Either our first parents were created in the image of God and experienced a fall into sin, or they did not. If there has been no fall, why would we need Christ to die in our behalf? If we are ever ascending and evolving into something better, why would Calvary and the Second Coming of Christ be necessary?

Is our planet evolving into something better? Some would say that scientific advances in the past centuries have provided evidence of progressive evolution. But humanity has utterly failed to subdue and control the sinful, selfish heart, and all the scientific progress has only made the world more dangerous, increasing attitudes of nihilism and despair.

Our only hope rests in Jesus. His incarnation is perfect evidence of God's creative power. If God could bring about this supreme miracle, there is no question as to His ability to form the first Adam. God has not left humankind without hope. The gospel of Christ can free us, restore us, redeem us!

Bible Discovery: Job 31:33; Ecclesiastes 7:29; Matthew 19:4, 5; John 1:12, 13; 8:44; Romans 5:12, 18, 19; 2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Timothy 2:14; Revelation 12:9

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 194.3

8. Was there a covenant of grace even before humanity's nature changed at the fall? Yes! Scriptures point out that even before Creation, the members of the Godhead covenanted to rescue the race if it should fall into sin. Jesus Himself was the surety of the covenant. Christ's surety meant that if humanity fell into sin, He would bear their punishment. Only Christ the Creator, the representative head of the race, could take that responsibility (Romans 5:12- 21; 1 Corinthians 15:22).

Today, if we accept God's offer of grace, we will face hostility from Satan. We will experience conflict! Yet through faith, we may also share in the Savior's victory at Calvary. Every individual on earth can experience the covenant promises of salvation by meeting the condition: "If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29). This means that God invites all ethnic groups of the earth into the sacred privileges of the covenantal relationships. In God's eyes, no ethnic people group is superior to another: "All are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

Bible Discovery: John 17:3; Ephesians 1:4-6; 2 Timothy 1:9; Hebrews 9:11-22; 1 Peter 1:20

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 370.4

9. What is the significance of God creating humanity as male and female? God Himself noted that "It is not good that man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18). As the three members of the

Godhead are united in a relationship of love, so should human beings created in the image of God reflect a relationship of love. To be genuinely human is to be relationship-oriented—seeking opportunities to live for others. God was clear that both male and female are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-28). Together, man and woman formed humankind. Together they represent the multi-faceted image of God. This interdependent aspect of the image of God is an integral part of the harmony and prosperity of His kingdom on earth.

The ideal marital relationship expressed at Creation was for man and woman to form a whole which would be mutually beneficial and complementary, illustrating the social dimension of the nature of humanity. That woman was built by God from the rib of man does not indicate subordination but rather essential equality. Woman is described as man's "ezer," sometimes translated as "helper," the same word used to portray God, who helps human beings (Psalm 33:20). *'Ezer Cenegdo* describes a power like him or facing him as equal. Thus, the companion God created for man, was to be his counterpart, his complement.

The function of sexual relations between a man and a woman in marriage should be in the context of commitment, intimacy, and mutual delight. This concept is much broader than just procreation or even recreation. Sexual differentiation helps define our personhood. The profound mystery of two human beings becoming one through the consummation of marriage in sexual relations also illustrates the love of God for His people and the intimacy of His care for the church.

Bible Discovery: Genesis 2:18, 22-24; Isaiah 62:5; Mark 10:6-9; Ephesians 5:22, 25-27; Hebrews 13:4

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46.2

10. Is it possible for humanity in its fallen state to overcome sin? A completely new life in the Spirit is the transforming gift of God. Through divine grace, we who are "dead in trespasses and sin" become victorious (Ephesians 2:1, 3, 8-10). John 15:4, 5 holds the recipe to success for overcoming sin: "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

The apostle Paul recognized that "I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (Romans 7:15). He lamented his wretchedness and cried out, "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24). Paul answers his own desperate question in Romans 8:1, 2. "So there is now no condemnation awaiting those who belong to Christ Jesus. For the power of the life-giving Spirit—and this power is mine through Christ Jesus—has freed me from the vicious circle of sin and death." Jesus has made it possible for us to perfect Christian character through the power of His name as we resist evil by His grace and under His instruction. Until we are translated, a tension remains between God's forgiveness cleansing us from sin and the reality that our sinful nature remains with us until our glorification at Jesus' second coming. (1 Corinthians 15:53)

In our new life in Christ, there is always the possibility of sin (1 John 2:1). However, we have left off rationalizing sin, or providing excuses for its existence in our life. Justifying our sin is part of our old life apart from God. Instead of efforts to vindicate our wrongdoing, we fall down and weep at the feet of Jesus, asking for renewed strength to overcome sin; inviting Him to cover us with His perfect robe of righteousness. Relying on the righteousness of Christ delivers us from the weight of pursuing perfection in our own strength (1 John 1:9, 10).

Bible Discovery: Romans 13:12; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 10:5; Philippians 4:13; Colossians 3:3; 2 Peter 1:3, 4; 2:9; Jude 1:24

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Colporteur Ministry*, p. 106.2; *Desire of Ages*, pp. 123.3; 664.4; *Messages to Young People*, p. 97.1; *With God at Dawn*, p. 146.2; *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 1, p. 144.2; Acts of the Apostles, p. 560.3; *Steps to Christ*, p. 64.2; *The Review and Herald*, February 17, 188, par. 18; *Signs of the Times*, June 17, 1889, par. 11

11. In what ways does the doctrine of humanity impact the Christian's life? Because God created humanity to have dominion over the works of His hands (Psalm 8:6), men and women bear responsibility to rule graciously over the world, imaging God's compassionate rule over the universe.

God has commissioned us to make a positive contribution by working to preserve the environment, care for the poor, the oppressed and those who have the least in society, and working to eradicate racism, poverty, human trafficking, and economic inequities.

We are to reflect our Maker in every way possible, seeking to live out the principles of the Ten Commandments to show our love for our Creator, as well as His creation.

Bible Discovery: Exodus 20:8-11; Matthew 22:37-39; 25:31-44; John 14:15; Colossians 3:1-17

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 676.4; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 25.1

12. What is humanity's future state? What is believed about human nature significantly impacts what is believed about human destiny. The Bible speaks of real places where God's people will live—first, the temporary abode of the righteous during the 1,000-year Millennium (see: *My Journey to Life: Step 27 - The Millennium*), and second, the new earth, re-created after the destruction of the wicked.

All hope for life beyond the grave centers on the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:16-23). The voice of God calls forth the redeemed dead to be caught up with the redeemed living into the clouds of glory at Christ's coming. God's plan for a permanent home for the saved is our own Planet Earth, renewed, renovated, and cleansed by purifying fire (2 Peter 3:10-13). We will

enjoy the companionship of God and the angels in a beautiful environment free from all consequences of sin, such as separation, pain, and death. Though the Bible gives few details about our future life, we know the redeemed will live a physical existence, praising God in the perfection of heaven for eternity.

Bible Discovery: Job 19:25, 26; Psalm 11:4; John 3:13, 31; 5:28, 29; 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 6:2, 3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 21:1-7

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 674.4

Reflection...

If you've recognized a battle with sin in your own life, you're not alone. Jesus took on human nature to transform men and women into His image, and He promises to do that for you. Our only hope is to accept God's covenant of His grace. Through faith, we can have a close and loving relationship with Jesus. Our Savior's blood spilt on this cross of Calvary gives assurance of salvation to every child of God. When Jesus returns, He will take to heaven those who have purified their souls in Christ and obeyed His teachings. The righteous will be granted immortality when Jesus returns. Sin, death, sorrow, and disease will be no more.

Next Step...

While it's important to understand who we are as individuals, it's also important to think about how we can get along with other people. Marriage and family are important parts of human relationships. In the next lesson, we'll talk more about these themes.

Discussion Questions

1. What is your own purpose in life?
2. What is the nature of humanity?
3. What does it mean for humanity to have dominion over God's earthly creation?
(Genesis 1:28)

Further Reading

Official Adventist Website: <https://adventist.org/nature-of-humanity>

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