

**Editor's note:**

- Words in **bold** appear in the student outline.
- Words in *italics* are what we suggest students write in their notes.
- Words in ALL CAPS are emphasized.

**Basic Christianity**  
**From An Urban Perspective Unit 1**  
**Week 1: Being Made in God's Image**

**Introduction**

Spirituality can be confusing. America is a "belief cafeteria" offering people a variety of faiths to choose from. Many people would identify themselves as Christians, but they often don't understand what that means.

When Christians believe the Bible but don't know what it really says, their faith is often shaky and unsatisfying. How can we apply our Christian faith to our lives if we don't have a deep grasp of what it is? It would be like trying to build a bridge without a solid foundation. No one in their right mind would dare drive their car across such a bridge.

We fill our lives with many things: watching TV, hanging out with friends, parenting our children, making ends meet. Many of these pursuits are important, but none are more so than learning about God and following him.

That's why we are glad you are willing to take time out of your schedule to take Basic Christianity from an Urban Perspective. Over the next 12 sessions, we hope to give you a solid foundation for your Christian faith. Whether you are exploring Christ, a new Christian, or an established believer, this material should help you know God better and follow him.

**Doctrine**

**Definition: Doctrine is a collection of basic truths taken from the Bible that answer key questions about life: "Who am I? How did I get here?" "What is right and wrong?" "Is there a God?" "If so, what is he like?"**

**Doctrine is important because *truth matters*.** Just as there are consequences to errors in engineering or science, so too there are consequences to being wrong in the realm of spiritual truth. That's why Jesus said, "you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). And we note too, the Apostle Paul's warning, "See to it that no one take you captive through philosophy or empty deception" (Colossians 2:8). Here are four key reasons why doctrine is vital:

- 1. Everyone needs answers to the "big" questions of life.** "What happens to me when I die?" "Where did I come from?" "Is there a God?" "How can I know God?"

Eternal issues are at stake. If the Bible is right, then the faith commitments a person makes in this life will determine their eternal destiny. Certainly, such ultimate and weighty concerns demand careful thinking through.

- 2. What we believe affects the way we live.** For example, some people think they could never change. Their motto is, "that's just the way I am." They have tried to change in the past but it was only superficial. Now they've concluded change is impossible.

Against this, Jesus taught we can change for the better. He said, "I came that you might have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). As we discover God's design for our lives and begin to live it out, God can give us his abundant life and transform us. We can't change ourselves, but he can change us.

Of course, the process of change happens slowly over a long period of time." As the saying goes, **"God can make a squash in three months, but it takes one hundred years to make an oak."**

Are you willing to let God change you? Do you believe he can do it? It won't happen unless you believe he can because what you believe really does affect the way you live.

**3. We need our lives to be based on *reality* and not lies.** We may pity the person whose life is in service to a lie—a Jehovah's Witness member going door to door, or someone going to see a psychic. We may admire their dedication, but realize that it is being wasted on falsehood. On the other hand, when our lives are poured into true and deeply meaningful things, it has a profoundly satisfying result: The best of our abilities and personalities are brought out. Life has a real direction and purpose versus just surviving.

**4. Doctrine organizes what the Bible teaches.** The Bible was written over a 1500-year period by dozens of authors living at different times in different cultures. Despite this, important truths are clearly and repeatedly taught from Genesis to Revelation. These truths include who God is, what it means to be human, how to be in right relationship to God, and many others. Doctrine takes all of these truths and organizes them into subjects. When you listen to a sermon at church, you get to sample a few verses in the Bible. Doctrine helps you see the whole chicken, not just a wing!

## Who Am I? The Christian View of Human Nature

**"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness'... And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." – Genesis 1:26, 27**

Have you ever asked someone how they really feel about themselves? People often walk around thinking, "I'm worthless." "I have nothing to offer." "No one has any use for me." The Bible says otherwise. Every human being who has ever lived bears the image of God. Because of that, each of us is valuable. This is the basis for our dignity as human beings.

Jesus understood the value of a human life and treated the people he met with dignity and respect. In Jesus' day, no one would touch or go near people with leprosy. And when a leper knelt before Jesus, pleading to be healed, many people would have walked away in disgust. But Mark says Jesus was "moved with compassion," and that he "reached out and touched him" (Mark 1:40, 41). What a picture of how God values humans.

**"What is man, that you (God) take thought of him? And the son of man, that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than God, and crowned him with glory and majesty!" – Psalm 8:4, 5.**

**The Bible places great value on human life. We are uniquely made in "the image of God." We are both physical and spiritual. There is something very special about each of us, according to the Bible.**

**What does it mean to be made in the "image of God?"**

Read **Genesis 1:28**. God asked Adam to take care of the world. Just as God rules creation, **God gave us an important job: caring for the world we live in**. God put you in this community so that you could do well and make a difference. That's part of your purpose.

Read **Genesis 2:15**. As God is *creative*, so is man. God gave us the land to farm. He gave us our minds and hands so we could create art, write books, make music. He is creative and so are we.

Read **Genesis 2:16, 17**. God gave us *free will*. We aren't robots. We are free to make choices that guide our lives.

Some people think they are a victim of their circumstances. They say "I had to do it," "I had no choice," "What else could I do?" – in other words, "my difficult situation justifies my actions." But God has given us the dignity to make our own decisions.

Because we are free, we can choose to do right or wrong. We don't usually blame animals for what they do. But people are different. We have the freedom to choose what path we follow. As a result, we are responsible before God for our actions.

Read **Genesis 2:18**. **We are social**. God built us to enjoy love relationships. This ability is essential to personhood.

Our ability to communicate, our values, and survival skills are all learned in the context of relationships with other people, especially the family.

Our God-given capacity for relationships explains why we are so consumed with finding love. Think about music and the movies – aren't the lyrics and stories mainly about seeking, finding, losing, and regaining love relationships with other people?

For many people, relationships are a painful subject. But God can help us establish strong, lasting friendships and marriages. The first step is getting to know God himself. You may have heard a Christian talking about having a "personal relationship with God." What does that mean? God wants to know you. He has thoughts he wants to share, and is interested in hearing what you have to say. He's a person. He has the ability to experience love and friendship just like you.

Read **Genesis 2:19, 20**. God enabled us to *think and learn*. We have a built in need to understand the world around us. We want to learn, not merely for the sake of survival, but simply to understand. We see the intense curiosity of children as evidence of this.

God wants you to use your mind. You shouldn't blindly believe what "pastor says." Paul says we should study to show ourselves approved (2 Timothy 2:15, 16). Our God-given mind enables us to evaluate what we hear and decide if it squares with the Bible.

Read **Genesis 1:28, 2:24**. God equipped us to have sex. So, sex is a good thing and not a sin. Sex joins two people in the most intimate way.

People don't realize that sex is designed to bind people together. Consider the example of two pieces of paper glued together. When we sleep with multiple partners, we leave a little bit of ourselves with each person. It is damaging to everyone involved.

Maybe you have heard, “marriage is a man-made thing.” Not true! God designed marriage as the proper place to enjoy sex. God is three people (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) in a permanent love relationship. Marriage is two people in a permanent love relationship.

Read **Genesis 2:25**. God made us to be *open and truthful*. At the beginning of the Bible, Adam and Eve were transparent with God and with each other. God wants us to be the same way. But when they sinned, Adam and Eve hid. We hide from God too.

So this is how God designed humans "in his image" to be. Yet, we know from our own experience that it's not that way now. There is another side to human nature, and we'll learn more about that next week.

**Memory Verse: Genesis 1:27**