

Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature,

Session 6, Image of God, Garden Trees

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All right. So we're diving deep today. Genesis.

Big questions, like the age of the Earth, that whole image of God thing, those trees in the garden, you know, the ones. Yeah, those are some biggies. We're using a lecture by Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, an Old Testament scholar, to kind of guide us.

Perfect. Okay, first off, how old does the Bible say the Earth is? Well, you might be surprised it doesn't, not specifically. Oh, come on, really? But don't people use those, like family lists, the genealogies in Genesis? They do.

Some folks try, yeah, using Genesis 5 and 11, calculating, and end up with dates like 4004 BC. But the problem is, archaeology throws a wrench in that. How so? Well, you got stuff like that tower they found at Jericho, 10,000 years old.

Right. A 6,000-year-old Earth doesn't fit with that, huh? Nope, not at all. Thing is, those genealogies, they're not meant to be a precise timeline.

They skip generations, kind of like a shortened family history, you know? So using those to pinpoint creation is like making a cake, but missing half the ingredients. Exactly. Dr. Hildebrandt is a great example.

For Matthew, Jesus' genealogy, Matthew 1 skips three kings. Between Jehoram and Uzziah, gone. So using those lists for the Earth's age, well, it's about as reliable as, I don't know, a weather forecast in a hurricane.

Okay, so no specific age from Genesis. What about this made-in-God's-image thing? It feels really relevant these days, you know? AI, cloning, cyborgs, all that. Absolutely.

Raises some serious questions about what it means to be human. Hildebrandt even predicts that, by 2025, computers might be smarter than us. Whoa, hold on.

That's a lot to take in. Where do we even start unpacking this image-of-God idea? Well, Hildebrandt outlines four key aspects. The first one is our spiritual and moral capacity.

We're different from animals. We get right and wrong, make choices. It's a reflection of God's nature.

So, like, we have a piece of God's moral compass inside us. Exactly. And that leads to the second aspect, relationality.

Genesis says, "Let us make man in our image." Plurality, right? We're made for relationship, shaped by the us, around us, our families, communities, even cultures. Yeah, that makes sense.

We're social creatures. God is relational, too. The Trinity, right? What about those other two aspects? Right.

So the third one is dominion and rule. God the king, he delegates, gives us responsibility. We care for the earth, all the creatures, stewards of creation.

Like we're junior partners in running this amazing planet. Precisely. Now the fourth one, this is where it gets tricky: physical resemblance.

Yeah, that's the one that always trips me up. We actually look like God. It's a head-scratcher for sure.

The Hebrew words image and likeness, they do have physical implications. Yeah. But how can we, finite beings, look like an infinite God? Right.

It's not like we're walking around with like halos and robes or anything. Uh-huh. Well, not exactly.

But Hildebrand, he throws out this interesting idea. What if we're made in Christ's image? What if Christ always had a human-like form? So not resembling some abstract God, but connected to Jesus, the image of the invisible God. Exactly.

And that changes things, right? How we see ourselves, how we treat others- everyone, no matter what they look like, how they act- they have that image of Christ within them. Changes how we interact with the world. That's powerful, but tough too, right? People do awful things.

Can we really see God's image in someone who hurts others, even ourselves when we mess up? Tough questions, no doubt. Yeah. And Hildebrand, he's honest about that.

He shares stories, you know, wrestling with this, seeing God's image in others. As he talks about this girl, Mabeline, they called her. She was in his high school, kind of an outcast, awkward.

Other kids didn't really include her much. Years later, Hildebrand finds out she became a Christian; it really hit him. How much people can change the potential, even the ones we might, I don't know, dismiss? That's so true.

We don't see what's inside, what someone might become, like judging a caterpillar for getting the butterfly it'll be, you know? Right. And he's got this other story, a Michael Card concert. Ends up sitting next to this guy, acting really strange.

Talk about superhuman strength, controlling computers with his mind, the whole bit. Whoa, sounds like a movie or something. It does, right? But Hildebrand realizes this guy, even with his issues, is still made in God's image.

Powerful, huh? Even in brokenness and strangeness, God's image is still there. Those stories, they're really something; they make you think, look beyond appearances, see the worth in everyone, even the tough ones. Always a challenge.

But that's the core of following Christ, right? Right. Loving as he does, even when it's hard. Okay, so we've talked about the image of God, but let's switch gears.

Those trees in Genesis, the tree of life, the knowledge one, always fascinated me. Yeah, they're key for sure. Hildebrand has some cool thoughts on them.

Tree of life, he asks. If Adam and Eve never saw death, how'd they get the whole life thing? Good point. If they didn't know death, would life even be special to them? Was there animal death before the fall? Things we kind of skip over, but he connects it to Revelation chapter 22.

Tree of life, it's there in the new Jerusalem, bookends the whole Bible, life, restoration, it's not over yet. Like a promise running through it all. God's plan, it's about life, coming back to that.

Exactly. Now, what the tree of life did, Hildebrand thinks it was more like a sacrament, symbolizing being right with God, not magical immortality or health food. Makes sense.

True life, abundant life, it's from God being connected to him. Right. Okay.

So the other tree, the one that always gets people talking, knowledge of good and evil. Oh, that one. How could they even understand evil, never having seen it? Seems like a setup, you know? It does.

Right. But Hildebrand, he says it's about choice. Real relationship, you've got to be able to choose.

Otherwise, it's like robots worshipping you. They have no other option. So God was saying, love me freely because you want to, not because you have to.

Exactly. He uses this analogy. It's brilliant.

Like we want a spouse who chooses us, not out of obligation, but freely given love. That's what God wants too: not fear, not force, but real love, desire for him. Okay.

I get the tree being there then, but that serpent still seems like a trickster manipulating them. This is where Hildebrand throws a curveball. He says the serpent actually tells the truth.

Wait, what? But isn't he all about deception? He is. But remember what he says. Genesis three: God knows you eat it.

Your eyes open. Be like God, knowing good and evil. Yeah.

That part always bugged me. Seemed like a lie to tempt them. It was tempting, but look what happened.

They eat it. God says in verse 22 that man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil. Technically, the serpent was right.

They did get that knowledge. Okay. Hold on.

My brain's twisting up now. So truth, but also deception. How's that work? He uses this great analogy: rat poison.

Think about it. It's mixed with something tasty, right? A rat goes for the good stuff and ends up eating a lie hidden inside. Same with Satan.

He can twist truth, make it dangerous. So a half-truth: they get knowledge, but it costs them everything. Exactly.

Disobedience, broken relationship with God, pain in the world, kicked out of paradise. All because of that. I'm seeing this rat poison thing now, dangling the truth, but leading to destruction.

Powerful image, right? Makes us ask, what rat poison are we swallowing? Stuff that looks good, but pulls us away from God. That's deep. We need to unpack that more: this rat poison, how to spot it with all the deception out there.

Absolutely. That's what we'll do next time. Diving deeper.

How to see those lies, stay on the path of truth. Okay. So last time, that whole serpent thing- twisting truth, that rat poison idea really stuck with me.

How do we not fall for those tricks? How do we spot those lies that look so good? Yeah. That's the million-dollar question. No easy answer, unfortunately.

But Hildebrand, he does offer some wisdom here. Got to be rooted in God's word, he says. Know the real deal.

You'll spot the fakes easier. Makes sense. Like those coin collectors, right? Study the genuine ones.

You'd know a phony right away. Exactly. Same for our faith.

Immerse yourself in scripture. You'll be better at seeing those subtle twists the enemy tries to pull. But the Bible, it can be a lot sometimes.

So many interpretations, debates, all that. How do we even know we're getting it right? That's where the Holy Spirit comes in. Hildebrand's big on this, relying on the Spirit's guidance.

He's like our truth detector. Helps us see what lines up with God's heart, what doesn't. So not just head knowledge, but a heart open to the Spirit's leading.

Absolutely. It's a relationship, learning to listen to that quiet voice guiding us. Like a spiritual GPS for when things get foggy, hard to see clearly.

Perfect analogy. And like a GPS, sometimes it might take us places we didn't expect. Challenges.

Convict us even. But it always leads to truth, to freedom. So know the Bible, rely on the Spirit.

Anything else we can do to build up those discernment muscles? Oh yeah. Community. Can't forget that.

Hildebrand talks about this too. Surrounding ourselves with other believers. They challenge us, encourage us, help us see things differently.

Like spiritual advisors. Helping us with tough choices when we're doubting, that kind of thing. Exactly.

So easy to get stuck in our own bubble, people who always agree. But iron sharpens iron, right? We need those honest voices. Loving but honest, to grow in wisdom.

So it's not enough to just know the truth, right? You've got to actually live it out. You got it. Actions, relationships, choices.

It all should show what we believe. Where the rubber meets the road. Quoting verses, that's one thing.

But letting truth change us, that's another level. For sure. Embodying the truth, letting it soak into everything we do.

Man, this deep dive into Genesis, it's been eye-opening. So much depth to these stories, what they tell us about God, ourselves, the whole world. It is amazing, isn't it? Thousands of years old, still so relevant.

And that rat poison thing, I'll be thinking about that. Being careful about what messages we're taking in, even if they seem good. Yeah, never know what's lurking beneath.

So as we wrap up, what's the one thing you hope people take away from all this? I'd say, remember, faith is a journey. It's an adventure. Twists and turns, surprises along the way.

We've got to stay vigilant, discerning, rooted in God's Word, empowered by the Spirit, and walking with each other, you know? Couldn't have said it better myself. And to everyone listening, keep seeking truth. Ask those hard questions.

Keep diving deep. There's always more to discover. Thanks for joining us.

Until next time, keep exploring.