

OT / COMMENTARY

FEATURING



AUTHOR Phillip Bethancourt

SERIES EDITORS David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida

CHRIST-CENTERED

Exposition

EXALTING JESUS IN

GENESIS



In the Beginning, God

GENESIS 1:1–2:3

Main Idea: God establishes his kingdom by speaking the universe into existence. He designs creation to reflect his glory and goodness as humanity takes leadership over it.

- I. God Forms the Created Kingdom (1:1-2).**
 - II. God Frames the Created Kingdom (1:3-13).**
 - A. The first day of creation (1:3-5)
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 - C. The third day of creation (1:9-13)
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 - A. The fourth day of creation (1:14-19)
 - B. The fifth day of creation (1:20-23)
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 - IV. God Finishes the Created Kingdom (2:1-3).**
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Genesis 1 tells how God created the world. It provides the setting for the unfolding narrative of Scripture. Chapter 1 shows who the main character of the Bible is—namely, God—and reveals his goodness.

The Bible's opening, in fact, is more concerned about the *who* of creation than the *how*. In contrast to the creation accounts of other ancient Near Eastern religions, Genesis 1 demonstrates the authority and sovereignty of Yahweh over creation. While many resources on Genesis consider complicated questions about the age of the earth and God's method of creating, this volume does not go into great detail. Instead, it recognizes there are numerous approaches to the specific details of the creation account in Genesis and that Christians can disagree on the mechanics of that account while still remaining in gospel fellowship.

Even so, three nonnegotiables are central to a Christian doctrine of creation. First, sound doctrine must recognize the virgin birth of creation, acknowledging that God creates *ex nihilo*. Before he speaks the universe into being, there is nothing in existence other than God. Second, such a doctrine must affirm the virtuous birth of creation, that

is, the goodness of all creation before the fall. Genesis 1 repeatedly declares that what God makes is “good.” Third, sound doctrine must affirm the verified “birth” of a historical, literal Adam. As Jesus affirms in the Gospels, there is one man, created by God, from whom the entire human race descends (see Acts 17:26).

With the sentence, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” the Bible begins in a manner both simple and profound. It gives a summary of the account ahead by portraying the timing of creation, the author of creation, and the scope of creation. Genesis 1, like each of the Bible’s creation accounts (cf. Ps 8; John 1; etc.), affirms the centrality of the Creator. It also provides insight concerning the purpose of both humanity and the universe.

Chapter 1 of Genesis repeatedly declares how “good” God deems creation to be. But many readers miss this point. Indeed, it is not uncommon for pastors to overlook the goodness of creation in their teaching. Due to the spiritual nature of the Christian faith, their focus is often drawn toward the goodness of our immaterial souls instead of our bodies or the creation around us. But Genesis speaks a different story. It teaches us the goodness of God’s creation expands beyond the spiritual realm into the physical world.

In Genesis, author Moses provides an overview of the earliest history of earth to his people. This helps them make sense of the world and understand their origins. Where we come from, after all, shapes the way we see the rest of the world and helps form our perspective of our purpose and future. That’s precisely what Moses is seeking to aid in writing this passage. The land in which the ancient Israelites lived, after all, had many competing stories about how the world was created. Many of these myths involved cosmic warfare between divine beings. Most “creation” narratives from the ancient Near East assumed the universe itself had always existed.

Contemporary creation myths abound as well. For example, many scientists consider the Big Bang to be the explanation of the origin of the universe. In this view, creation originates at a specific moment and establishes space and time as the creation expands from its starting point. Many combine this account with Darwinian evolution to explain the origins of biological life through random chance and the survival of the fittest. Such ideas are not just scientific theories; they are the foundations of an entire way of thinking about the world. These origin

stories not only give an opinion about where the universe came from. They also shape people's beliefs about the way humans should live.

Genesis 1 is given for our instruction. As we understand God's creation, we come to better understand his character and his redemption. The chapter shows us the way he works in the world. It calls us to live in accordance with the way he designed it to operate. It shapes how we live out the call to leadership that he gave humanity.

God Forms the Created Kingdom

GENESIS 1:1-2

Genesis 1 fundamentally shapes the rest of Scripture. It is not a saga, legend, or creation myth like those linked to other ancient Near Eastern religions. Instead, it is history. It is written to reveal how the universe came into existence and how God will unfold his purposes for his people. Genesis 1:1-2 reveals that God forms the created kingdom with his purpose and his presence.

Where Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning," many readers wonder how long ago that beginning actually was. Genesis does not clearly say. Rather, the words are intended to call attention to the fact that God was the one present and active from "the beginning." Still, the age of the earth is an important question that merits consideration.

Some modern Christians tend to assume that because ancient people were less educated than people living today, we should be suspicious of the beliefs they held. Modern scientists, after all, claim that the natural order is much older than the genealogies of Genesis appear to indicate. This apparent certainty has caused many people either to abandon or to reinterpret the teaching of Genesis at this point.

In light of this, how should Christians think about the Genesis account and the age of the earth? Believers must recognize that people do not evaluate the natural order as neutral observers. We should not be surprised by efforts to reinterpret Genesis in ways that seem more rational or realistic to twenty-first-century minds, nor should we be discouraged by those who reject the Bible's creation account altogether. As the apostle Paul points out in Romans 1, God has plainly revealed himself to all humans in creation, but fallen humanity by nature "suppress[es] the truth" in "unrighteousness" (Rom 1:18-20). Thus, whatever questions we might have on this or other topics, we are wise to hold fast to the clear teaching of Scripture.

Several points should be emphasized concerning the age of the earth. First, God is the Creator, and the creation exists solely because of the creative work God began “in the beginning.” Second, the Bible offers no precise timelines concerning the age of the earth. Whether the earth and the physical universe are to be considered relatively “young”—mere thousands of years old as the genealogies of Genesis seem to indicate—while appearing to be much older, or whether the created order is millions of years old, Genesis clearly affirms that everything that exists only does so because of God’s creative act. Third, any interpretation of Genesis that rejects God’s role as the Creator, or Adam and Eve as literal, historical human beings, is in conflict with the Bible’s teaching. Finally, it should be stated again that Christians may reach different conclusions about the earth’s age while still enjoying fellowship.

Genesis 1:2 speaks of the “Spirit of God” hovering over the waters in a way that signals a pattern appearing throughout the Bible. The Spirit brings order out of chaos. Where do we see this language about the Spirit hovering as an act of new creation again? When Gabriel tells Mary that the Spirit of the Lord will overshadow her. This is the same kind of language used in Genesis 1 (Luke 1:35). And when the Spirit “hovers” over Mary, she will conceive a male whose coming will ultimately launch a new creation, a new humanity. Moreover, when her son Jesus is baptized, the Spirit descends on him after hovering over the waters of the Jordan River. And similarly, Jesus is raised from the dead by the Spirit of God coming upon him and bringing him back to life (Rom 1:4).

Genesis 1:2 also reveals the Trinitarian nature of God’s creation. Throughout the Scriptures, all three members of the Trinity are associated with creation. In addition to the role of the Spirit highlighted in Genesis 1:2, both Genesis 1 and Psalm 8 emphasize the role of Yahweh in creation. And in Colossians 1:16, the apostle Paul tells us of Christ’s role in creation. He writes, “[A]ll things have been created through him and for him.” The beginning of the Bible thus shows the centrality of Christ to its story. Christ-centered redemption comes for a universe established by Christ-shaped creation.

God Frames the Created Kingdom

GENESIS 1:3-13

After God forms the created kingdom, he frames it with *light*, with *limits*, and with *land*.

The First Day of Creation (1:3-5)

Beginning on day one of creation, God frames the kingdom with light. His speech calls the universe into existence, bringing order out of chaos through the power of his word. This, in fact, is why the New Testament authors credit creation to Christ. He is “the Word” that is creating all things (John 1:1-3). God saying, “[L]et there be light,’ and there was light,” signals that Jesus, the Word who becomes flesh, is present at creation.

God’s work in creation week also reveals God’s wisdom. Proverbs 3:19-20 tells us, “The LORD founded the earth by wisdom and established the heavens by understanding. By his knowledge the watery depths broke open, and the clouds dripped with dew.” Genesis 1 shows us that God established the heavens and the earth through wisdom.

The New Testament tells us the wisdom of God and the power of God are personal. Paul the apostle says “the Greeks” search after “wisdom,” wanting to know the way the world works, and “the Jews” seek “signs” of power, wanting to know how to control the world. But we know that Christ Jesus is “the wisdom” *of God* and “the power” *of God* (1 Cor 1:22-25). When we see God speaking the galaxies into existence, when we see God speaking light and life, then we need to envision Jesus of Nazareth. And when we see God declaring his creation is good or declaring its wisdom, we need to envision the same. This is the wisdom and power of God at work, so much so that Paul, when talking about the wisdom of Christ, is talking about it in terms of an ancient “mystery” (1 Cor 2:7).

God’s speech brings about God’s results. That is true in the creation account. It is true of the calling of Abraham in Genesis 12. It remains so throughout the Bible. Scripture repeatedly shows God’s power through the productivity of his word. When Jesus walks by the fishermen and tells them, “Follow me,” they drop their nets and do so (Matt 4:18-20). When Jesus speaks to people possessed by demons and commands the evil spirits to come out of them, the demons obey (Mark 1:25). As Jesus, on a boat in the midst of wind and waves, commands, “Be still,” nature calms (Mark 4:39). So the power of God’s word first demonstrated in Genesis 1 is underscored throughout the Bible.

On the first day of creation, God creates light, separates it from the darkness, and gives them names. The light he calls “day” and the darkness “night.” But some are troubled that God does not create the sun,

stars, and moon until the fourth day. That seems absurd. How could day and night exist without the sun and moon? Why would God do things in such a way? Many of the religions surrounding Israel worshiped the sun, moon, and stars. In contrast, Moses shows Israel that there is no autonomous sun or moon worthy of worship. Instead, God shows his sovereignty over creation in a way that drives his people to worship him and not the creation.

God's authority over light and darkness in creation helps shape our understanding of the conflict between the kingdom of light and kingdom of darkness that rages throughout Scripture. Because we live in an electrified world today, we tend to miss the significance of light as a theme. The people originally hearing these words, however, do not. In Scripture, "darkness" provokes images of danger, opposition, and hostility. Yet God shows that from the beginning he created darkness and has ruling authority over it. We have a King who sovereignly stands against the darkness of Satan's work in the world.

The Second Day of Creation (1:6-8)

On day two of creation, God frames the kingdom with limits. God declares his sovereignty over the waters, over the skies, and over the atmosphere. This second day introduces the important theme of water in the Bible. Its importance is difficult to grasp in a culture like ours where seemingly endless supplies of drinkable water are available at every faucet. But this situation is far removed from what the Israelites experienced.

For Israel and others in the ancient Near East, waters are chaotic and dangerous. They are both the source of life and the threat of danger. There is, after all, a risk both in an abundance of water and its absence. It brings flood and famine. Water is viewed as a threat to the people of God, as seen in their recounting of the risks of the sea and respect for its monsters like "Leviathan" (Job 41:25; Ps 104:26). Water is also a threat to the people of God in the thirst they experience (Exod 17:2-3). The desperation for water God's people have, in fact, is precisely why these words by Jesus carry such force: "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. The one who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, will have streams of living water flow from deep within him" (John 7:37-38).

In Genesis 1 God shows that he creates the waters and separates them from the expanse. This is preparation for life. It is preparation

for the flourishing of his image bearers. Indeed, God's handiwork is for those made in his "image" (Gen 1:27). When God creates the waters, he is looking ahead to a coming day when Jesus will sanctify his church with "the washing of water by the word" (Eph 5:26). He also anticipates a coming new creation in which a river of endless, life-giving water is present for his people (Rev 22:1). Water and God's sovereignty over the waters are central themes that recur throughout the Bible.

The Third Day of Creation (1:9-13)

On the third day, God frames the kingdom with land. God divides the land from the waters while creating the earth, seas, and vegetation. His creation of the seas establishes an important motif connected to the water imagery in Scripture. At times the Bible portrays the seas as a hostile enemy that invokes fear. For instance, when Israel flees from Egypt, they panic as they are trapped by the sea, before God delivers them from their pursuing enemies (Exod 14). Throughout Scripture, warfare imagery often includes references to battling against the sea and its monsters (Ps 74:13). That, in fact, is why it is so significant that God promises to bring his people safely through the waters (Isa 43:2). In Genesis 1 God artfully assures his people they should not fear the sea because it would not exist apart from him. As its Creator, he is the sea's master.

Two sources of fear in ancient culture were the sea and the land—two of the things already covered in Genesis 1. Anxiety about the sea was related to protection: Will I be safe even in the dangers of the water? Anxiety about the land was related to provision: Will I have enough from the land to provide? Those same fears about protection and provision still show up today, even if in different ways. Day three should transform our perspective of our fears. If God created the seas, he can protect us from the dangers of the sea. If God created the land, then he can provide for us. The same is true today. We can trust God to protect and provide for us. Genesis 1 reminds us of Romans 8:31: "If God is for us, who is against us?"

When we understand God's role in creating the seas, it reshapes our understanding of baptism, too. Jesus foretells his death by declaring that he has a "baptism" experience to undergo; that is, he will experience the wrath of God (Mark 10:38). As new believers are baptized, they are

plunged into waters representing judgment and brought through them as a symbol of God's conquest over Satan, sin, and death (Col 2:12).

When God produces vegetation during the third day, it sets the stage for the many ways plant life will shape the unfolding story of Scripture. Vegetation proves important from what happens in the garden of Eden, to building the ark of Noah, to providing the staff of Moses, to creating the ark of the covenant. All of this sets the stage for a coming Messiah, whom the prophets describe as a root, a branch, a stump, a shoot (Isa 11:1). How does Jesus describe himself? As a vine (John 15:5). This particular vegetation theme started on the third day culminates when Christ the Savior of the world is hung upon a tree (Acts 5:30; Gal 3:13). Vegetation plays a major role throughout the biblical narrative, and Moses shows us how it all starts on the third day of creation.

God Fills the Created Kingdom

GENESIS 1:14-31

After God frames the created kingdom, he fills it with creatures made through his provision and with humans made in his image.

The Fourth Day of Creation (1:14-19)

On day one, God says, "Let there be light" (v. 3). On day two, God says let there be limits. On day three, God says let there be land. Now, on days four through six, God says let there be *life*. Why is it that God creates vegetation on the third day but does not create the sun, essential to its flourishing, until the fourth? God brings forth fertility before he creates the sun to show that he alone is the giver of life. He, not the sun, is the sustainer of life. Ultimately, the vegetation is not dependent on the sun or the phases of the moon but on God.

This stands in stark contrast to the beliefs of the fertility cults that surrounded Israel. In writing Genesis, then, Moses shows Israel that fertility cults are not viable because life comes only through God. The manner in which the creation narrative is recounted shows the futility of seeking solace in anyone but him. The fourth day of creation enables us to resist other gods confidently and honor the second of the Ten Commandments.

The creation story was intended to shatter the allure of the false gods of Israel, and it should do the same for us today. In our culture, people still worship contemporary versions of these ancient fertility gods that promise things like the American dream. The creation story reorients us to resist this siren song by instead worshiping the God who spoke the sun, moon, and stars into existence. Genesis 1 shows that God is the Creator of all, from the smallest plant on earth to the largest star in the galaxy. God shows his sovereignty over all living things by sustaining them through the provision of water and light.

The Fifth Day of Creation (1:20-23)

God creates the creatures of the sea and the birds of the air, calling them to be fruitful and multiply. As God begins to create the diverse animals, it shows the glory of his creativity. God does not actually need six days to create the universe. He could have created everything instantly. But he does things over six days according to a process. He speaks, and the sea creatures and birds come into existence; he evaluates them and declares them good. Why does he do things this way? God is showing his glory through his creativity. Just think about it. The size of the blue whale. The brilliant colors of reef fish and parrots. The grace of the eagle. The playfulness of dolphins. Every creature in creation helps display the glory of God.

The fifth day shows that creation is not just intended for the presence of humanity. The creation, in all its vast array, is intended to be home to the animals and also a temple worthy of the presence of God. Genesis 1, in fact, describes the universe as the temple of God and Eden like the holy of holies. The creativity of his handiwork sets the stage for the worship of his glory. God creates the universe and fills it with his presence. God creates the world with such majesty because he is going to take up residence in it. This picture of the temple points ahead to the way Jesus speaks about himself as the temple of God (John 2:18-22). It also foreshadows wonders to come (Rev 21:1-4,22-23).

The Sixth Day of Creation (1:24-31)

When reading Genesis 1, we may be tempted to gravitate to the sixth day of creation because that is when God creates humanity. But we cannot understand what God does on the sixth day unless we see how it serves as the capstone of what God has done on the first five. From the tiniest

plankton to the largest creatures ever to have lived, God creates all the wildlife on the earth. Mentioned here are the same kinds of animals that Adam names in the garden (2:19-20) and that Noah rescues on the ark (chs. 6–8). Then God declares that all his creation is good (1:25). But note he says this before he creates man and woman. By doing so, God sets the stage for the coming of the capstone of his creation.

God makes humanity in his image and likeness. What does that mean? My wife and I are raising four boys. Several years ago, we stumbled upon the ultrasound image of our oldest. Even when people look at grainy pictures like that one, they often try to discern any ways a child looks like his or her parents. What we inherently know is that every child, in a sense, is an image of his or her father or mother. That's what Genesis 1 is saying about all of humanity. Each of us is, in a sense, a picture of our heavenly Father. We're designed to reflect who God is and what he's like.

In contrast to the rest of God's creatures, humanity is designed to reflect him in our character, our convictions, our calling, and our community. Our lives are intended to image who he is, what he does, why he created us, and how he connects us. The Trinitarian overtones in this declaration ("Let us make") are significant because part of what it means to be made in the image of God is to reflect him in community, in relationship (v. 26). As the text shows us, both "male and female" reflect this image (v. 27). Since every person is made in God's image, then this truth should fundamentally shape how we engage with one another. As image bearers, all people have the same inherent dignity—regardless of their age, sex, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

The image of God is best reflected in the life of Jesus. As Genesis 3 will soon show us, the presence of sin now distorts the image of God in humanity. Just as the broken screen of a dropped phone makes it difficult to see things on that phone clearly, so the fall into sin shatters the image we are designed to display. But in Jesus, the God-man perfectly reflects his Father in his character, convictions, calling, and in the way he pursues community. This is precisely why Paul declares that Jesus is "the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15). Genesis 1:26 thus anticipates the coming Messiah who would fully reflect the image that all of God's people are called to embody. Jesus is both the architect and the blueprint for what it means to be made in the image of God.

The sixth day of creation calls humanity not only to reflect God's image but also to rule his creation. This passage speaks of humanity's

obligation to rule, to subdue, to be fruitful and multiply, and to lead. God calls people to take dominion over his creation for his glory and our good. Instead, Adam and Eve reject this instruction by eating of the one forbidden fruit in a way that seeks their own glory, forsakes God's mandate, and trusts the false promises of Satan. In the coming of Christ, however, the Bible records the restoration of this kingdom leadership. Jesus rules over his enemies, subdues death, and fulfills God's command to be fruitful and multiply by rescuing a people for himself who can thus fulfill the creation mandate by the power of his Spirit.

God declares the sixth day of creation not just good but "very good." We are tempted to assume the broken world around us is what is normal, what God always intended. But Genesis 1 shows us that is not the case. As God finishes his work of creating the universe, he declares the goodness of the glory it displays. And in it there is no sin, no death, no sorrow, no sickness, no failure. God has established his kingdom, raised up its rulers, and called them to reflect his image as they take dominion over it.

God Finishes the Created Kingdom

GENESIS 2:1-3

After God fills the created kingdom, he finishes it with his own rest. The climax of the Genesis creation story, then, is not the making of mankind but the Sabbath rest of God. Why? Because the primary purpose of the creation account is not *what* is created but *who* created it. The text declares, "[T]he heavens and the earth and everything in them were completed" (v. 1); therefore, the work lacks nothing, and there are no loose ends to tie up. Only one chapter into the Bible, we see proof that God accomplishes what he sets out to do.

What does it mean that God "rested" on the seventh day (v. 2)? Is God weary from his hard work? No. Instead, the passage picks up on a theme common to the ancient Near Eastern literature of Moses's day, in which divine rest is connected to the construction of a temple. In such narratives, when a temple for a god is finished, its deity is said to rest in it in order to recognize its goodness. Likewise, Genesis 1 tells the story of how God builds a temple for himself. The creation is not just designed to house creatures and humanity; it is also the place where God intends to dwell alongside his people. God celebrates the completion of this temple by resting in it, blessing it, and declaring it holy. In the New

Testament, Jesus rebuilds the temple through his death and resurrection (John 2:19) and ultimately restores God’s original design to dwell with his people in the new heavens and the new earth (Rev 22).

Genesis 2 begins by declaring the creation “completed.” In other words, God looks at the universe and says, “It is finished.” Does that phrase sound familiar? We do not just see it here at the start of the original creation. We also hear Jesus echo the words “It is finished” on the cross as he ushers in the new creation (John 19:30). This inauguration of the new creation on the cross is not celebrated from the comfort of heaven but from the agony of earth.

Genesis 2 never uses the word *Sabbath*; nevertheless, it establishes a trajectory that shapes the biblical narrative. The Sabbath is *created* as God rests on the seventh day, Saturday. Soon we will see how the Sabbath is *corrupted* by sin as our rebellion ruins our rest. Later, the Sabbath is *commanded* for Israel to observe weekly. The Sabbath is *confirmed* in Jesus’s life as he honors it as Lord of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is *completed* in Jesus’s resurrection as he, according to Hebrews 4, becomes our Sabbath rest. The Sabbath is *converted* in the early church as Christians begin to worship weekly on the Lord’s Day, Sunday. The Sabbath will be *culminated* in the new creation as we experience an everlasting Sabbath rest in Christ.

We often think of limits, rest, and Sabbath as unproductive inconveniences to be endured rather than beneficial gifts to be enjoyed. But in Mark 2:27 Jesus says, “The Sabbath was made for man.” God finishing his work on the created kingdom sets the stage for our work in the created kingdom—work that is ongoing but also benefits from periods of rest.

Reflect and Discuss

1. God repeatedly declares creation “good” in the opening chapter of Genesis. Why is it important to grasp that he says this of matter and the human body in particular?
2. Christians of goodwill can disagree about the age of the earth. However, they must affirm the necessity of a Creator and his divine work in the creation of the cosmos. Why is it necessary to affirm the personal and intricate nature of this Creator God?
3. Paul says Christ is the means through whom God creates (Col 1:16). How does the presence of Christ at the beginning of Genesis set a pattern for the rest of Scripture?

4. God speaks the universe into existence in the opening chapter of Genesis. The Son of God will later be identified as the *logos* or “Word” of God (John 1). What benefits come of embracing this biblical parallel? How is Genesis anticipating the coming Word of God? How is John pointing back to the creation narrative in the opening of his Gospel?
5. Throughout the opening chapter, God displays his authority by bringing order out of chaos, such as with his taming of the water on the second day of creation. In what New Testament instances does Christ exercise his authority over nature? What does this reveal about his character and power?
6. As God continues to create, each day sees the planet moving toward a definite goal: chaotic seas give rise to dry land, giving rise to vegetation capable of sustaining life, leading to the establishment of animal and human life. What does this contribute to a discussion of God’s providence and sovereignty?
7. As God creates birds of the air and fish of the seas, the limitless creativity and artistry of his character are on display. Provide examples of how we as image bearers continue to share in his creative work.
8. Before creating humanity, God makes all the animal kinds and declares creation “good” (1:25). In what way is it good?
9. As the capstone of his creation, humans share in the image of God. They are bestowed with honor and dignity as representatives of God on earth. How, in spite of the curse, do they still display this honor? How do they anticipate the future incarnation of God as the true representative of God on earth?
10. God chooses to rest or enjoy his creation on the seventh day. In what ways is rest a part of the holy order he has created? How is rest an act of worship?

CHRIST-CENTERED EXPOSITION

WITH AUTHORS AND SERIES EDITORS

David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida

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Phillip Bethancourt is the lead pastor of Central Church in College Station, Texas. He is a graduate of Texas A&M University and holds a Ph.D. from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is also the co-author of *Christ-Centered Parenting*. He has been married to Cami since 2005, and they have four sons.

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