

Think with me about the anticipation parents have about bringing home their first-born child. In the months leading to the delivery, there is a seemingly never-ending check list of things to do: paint the nursery; assemble the crib; buy the diapers, blankets and teeny tiny clothes; childproof the outlets; set up the rocking chair; pick out the first stuffed animal. You're not doing all that work because you're bored and looking for something to do! It's preparation so that your home is ready to welcome your baby, so that it is the perfect place for your child to grow up and thrive, so that it will be the ideal environment for this little person, someone made in your image, birthed out of love, someone you want a close relationship for their entire life, to make their home.

In many ways, that's what God has done with creation. We are in week three of a 21-week series going through the book of Genesis. So far, we have seen "In the beginning, God." God is the uncaused cause, the eternal one, the infinite one, the one who is radically beyond our world yet intimately involved in every aspect of it. Then, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." God formed, fashioned, and filled this vast, expansive, and beautiful universe—the sun, stars and moon, the mountains and valleys, the rivers and lakes and oceans, the birds that fly in the air, the fish that swim in the water, the animals that walk across the ground. After he did all the preparatory work, we finally see *why* God did it all. It wasn't creation for creation's sake, but creation for a purpose, creation for a relationship. After God had the world just so, we pick up in Genesis 1:26-27:

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Chapter 1 gives us the overview, but in chapter 2, we read in more detail. "Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed" (Genesis 2:7-8). God creates the whole world, then he hand-fashions humanity, the crowning jewel of creation, breathing into our lungs the breath of life and marking us with his image. The book of Genesis teaches us so many things about humanity, but the first and most foundational truth we learn is that *God made us in his image*. Throughout Scripture we see that being made in God's image has multi-faceted implications. Today we are going to highlight the five most prominent aspects of being made in God's image.

Resemblance

Men and women resemble God in ways unlike anything else in all creation. God is spirit, not matter, so our resemblance to God is not in the contours of our face or our physical appearance, but in shared attributes. Mountains are majestic, storms are powerful, dolphins are intelligent, dogs are loyal, peacocks are beautiful, elephants have great memories—all creation is unique and magnificent in its own way, but people resemble God in ways unlike anything else in creation. Let's highlight a few

Reason

Humanity has the ability to reason in a way no other creature does. Sure, certain other primates can use stone tools, but people can think up $E=mc^2$. Dogs can catch frisbees and orcas can hunt in packs, but humans can build rocket ships that send people into outer space. But it's more than solving math equations and complex obstacles; it's contemplating life, thinking about the future, and reflecting on the past.

This past Tuesday would have been my mom's birthday. That morning, I was sitting in my office feeling sad and missing her. I texted a friend who also lost his mom and asked if he was free for lunch. We sat down, shared a pizza, and shared stories about our mothers, using napkins as tissue paper. Only people can reason like that. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, "God has also set eternity in the human heart." As humans, we think about things in a way and at a depth that is totally unique from the rest of creation—because God made us in his image.

Creativity

God is the ultimate Creator, and he gave us the ability to create like him. NT Wright says, "When we make something beautiful, true, or good, we are echoing the God who made us and called us to join in his creative work." When we create recipes, art, music, poetry, and novels, when we create language and culture, when we design the pyramids, the Hoover Dam, Notre Dame, and entire cities—it's an expression of the image of God. John Paul II said, "The artist's creativity is a reflection of the Creator, who brought forth from nothing that which is."

Morality

As people, we innately understand the difference between right and wrong. In the rest of creation, the strong rule over the weak, and often eat them. Father lions often kill their male offspring; it's what happens. Wolves eat elk; it's what happens. It's not wrong; it's nature. But that's not how humans are supposed to behave. We know exploiting the weak is wrong, lying is wrong, theft is wrong, injustice is wrong, rape and murder are wrong. They're not subjectively wrong based on social conditioning. They are objectively wrong. The reason they are wrong is because we are made in God's image, and the reason we know they are wrong is because we are made in God's image. CS Lewis went from being an atheistic Oxford professor to being one of the most famous and influential Christians of the entire twentieth century. It was his reflection on morality that led to his conversion. He described his journey in *Mere Christianity*, saying, "My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?" Morality springs from the image of God.

Love

1 John 4:7-8 says, "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God...God is love." Listen to how Thomas Merton elaborated

on this: "To say that I am made in the image of God is to say that love is the reason for my existence, for God is love. Love is my true identity. Selflessness is my true self. Love is my true character. Love is my name." No other part of creation can say that—love is not the true identity of a cat or a shark or tree. Love is not the name or the purpose of corn or a caterpillar. But we were made in God's image; we were made to love as he loves.

Free Will

St Augustine said, "The will is the power of the soul by which a person chooses for himself to do or not to do something." No other part of creation has free will. Rivers and stars follow the laws of nature. Herds of buffalo and hopping kangaroos follow biological imperative, social stimuli, and sensory input. But we possess a divinely endowed ability to contemplate choices, evaluate options, weigh the outcomes, and choose what we want. We are the only other part of creation that has free will, and our free will is part of the way God has allowed us to resemble him.

Respect

But the image of God goes deeper than simply resemblance, only attributes we share in common; it's also about respect—value, worth, dignity, and honor. Because God made humanity in his image, because God set us apart from the rest of creation, because every person is a unique masterpiece from the creator and author of life, every human life should be respected and honored accordingly. Earlier this month, a piece of art that was purchased at liquidation for \$200 was inspected at closer level and found to be signed by Salvador Dali, a famous Spanish painter. When the signature was found, the painting's value escalated from \$200 to \$40,000. It was special and valuable because it was made by someone of great esteem. How much more valuable is humanity, made in the image of God himself, with his unique signature and fingerprints on every one of us? Psalm 139:13-14 says, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." Because every person bears God's image, we know we are all fearfully and wonderfully made; we have infinite value and dignity. We also know that because God is the source of our life, he is sovereign over our life. John Paul II said, "Man's life comes from God: it is his image and imprint, as sharing in his breath of life. God therefore is the sole Lord of this life: Man cannot do with it as he wills." What does that mean? This means an outright rejection of six key things:

Suicide

I want to be careful and loving in this moment, because this has been a part of the journey for many of you: there may not be anything more painful than losing a loved one to suicide. God sees you in the processing of this loss, and our church sees you and loves you. There is no shame or condemnation on any victim of suicide. But what makes this such a grievous experience? The image of God in my life means I can't take my own life. Even when you feel despair, even if you are in pain, even if you feel you don't want to live any longer. Your life doesn't just belong to you, it belongs to God, and you cannot destroy something that belongs to the Creator! If you are in this place today, cry

out to God today, and reach out to someone who can encourage you. Any of our pastors would love to pray with you and walk alongside you.

Abortion

The fingerprints of God are on every human being. Even the smallest. Even the youngest. Science tells us for a fact now that life starts at conception. On day one, *day one*, the baby has 46 chromosomes and unique DNA. The baby is not the mom, but it is a unique human being different from the mom. The baby is being knit together by God and is a unique, masterful, once-in-all-of-history expression of God's image. Taking the life of that child is not an option, because that child is made in the image of God.

As a church, we are never a voice of condemnation and shame for anyone who has made a mistake in the past. If abortion is part of your story, the grace, mercy, forgiveness, and love of God is here and fully available. This is not a message of condemnation; this is a word of advocacy for the precious children, made in God's image, the most vulnerable among us. The combined deaths from every war we've ever fought is just a sliver compared to the lives of our own children that we have claimed by choice. It's wonderful that two years ago the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v Wade*, but abortion has continued to increase since then. Abortion has dropped by 98% in Indiana medical facilities; that's incredible news. But abortion in our neighboring states has risen precipitously. Every month, telehealth doctors send over 10,000 abortion pills through the mail for moms to end the lives of their infants at home. This is cruelty, inhumanity, and trampling on God's image in the most ruthless and offensive way. The fight to recognize God's image in the yet to be born is far from over. God's people must see God's image in each little life and leverage our influence and resources to protect it.

Racism

Every person is a unique and beautiful expression of God's image, no matter the color of their skin, background, or ethnicity. All people are to be cherished and treated with love. The angels in heaven, when they praise Jesus, sing, "You were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9). Jesus created, died for, and extends salvation to all people! I've been blessed the last few years to meet people at this church who have confessed to the sin of racism. They've said things like, "In the home I grew up in, in the circles that I grew up in, people with different skin color were seen as either lesser human beings or less desirable human beings. But since I became a disciple of Jesus, God has shown me how sinful that is. God has healed my heart. God has replaced hatred with love." It's the image of God that makes slavery, segregation, and discrimination wrong. I am personally deeply indebted to and grateful for friends whose skin color and background are different from mine. My life is better because of the unique perspective and heritage they've shared with me—a different but treasured expression of God's image.

Sexism

This is spelled out as clearly as possible in Genesis 1:27, "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." Any form of demeaning or

disregarding or objectifying a person of the opposite sex is entirely forbidden based on the image of God in men and women. This applies directly to the consumption of pornography: yes, lust is wrong. Yes, it leads to addiction, isolation, and shame. But at its core, pornography is an assault on the image of God in people. It objectifies, commodifies, and exploits, degrades God's precious image in other people.

Classism

If racism devalues people of different ethnicities and sexism devalues people of different genders, classism devalues people of different social standing, often tied to wealth. When this happened in the early church, and leaders aggressively spoke against it. "If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, 'Here's a good seat for you,' but say to the poor man, 'You stand there' or 'Sit on the floor by my feet,' have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?" (James 2:3-4). The image of God is equally present in people of every social standing.

Ableism

It's not only the strong and intelligent that bear God's image; it's also the not so strong and not so intelligent. It's the young and the old, the attractive and the disfigured. Throughout his ministry Jesus gave special attention to the lame, the blind, and the deaf. He saw God's image in all people, and he wants us to, as well.

Relationships

The image of God in all humanity leads to respect for all humanity. It also leads to relationships. God has eternally existed in a community of love—Father, Son, and Spirit. To be made in his image means we are created for life-giving, self-giving relationships. Stanley Grenz said, "Because God is a relational being, the divine image is most clearly reflected in our capacity to live in relationship with others."

Keren and I married when I was 30 and she was 31. I've had a lot of people ask me if it was hard to be single all the way through my twenties and the honest answer is no. Yes, I hoped to get married one day, and I hoped for a family. And it was hard to wait for that for an indefinite amount of time. But singleness brought its own expression of joy and fulfillment to me because as a single person, I prioritized relationships. I had roommates from the time I left the house at 18 until two days before I was married. It wasn't about rent assistance. It was about living in community! We shared meals together, went to church together, played sports together, opened our home for hospitality to others, and helped each other grow in our faith. That's how God designed us to live. Whether you are single or married, no kids, young kids, adult kids, God wants us to order our lives to live truly communally—not only in proximity to others, but with depth and love.

I was speaking with a widow in her seventies last week, and she said, "Yes, losing my husband was so hard. But I wasn't expecting to lose my friends, too. After he passed, everyone came around and cared for me for a few months, but after that, because it was so strange for them for him to be gone and for

it to be only me, I'm never included anymore." Why does that story make our hearts sink? Because we were made for relationships. John Stott said, "The fact that God is love shows that the Imago Dei is not an individualistic concept; it finds its truest expression in community." Think about that: the truest way you can express the image of God is not by becoming a really great version of yourself. It's not "be all you can be"; it's living a life of love, unity, and fellowship with other people. The average person in America today has three close friends, but desires twelve to fifteen. Mark Zuckerberg from Facebook has suggested AI chat bots, connecting with digital algorithms. Even when you hear that, you know it's wrong. We don't need a connection with a computer; we need a connection with people, and we need it because we are made in God's image.

Responsibility

The image of God not only calls us to relationship with others, but it also highlights our God-given responsibility. Listen to how closely responsibility relates to the image of God in Genesis 1:26: "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'" It wasn't only the endowment with God's image for our enjoyment, but it was also entrusting us with responsibility. When the board of a company chooses a new CEO, it's not just so the CEO gets a corner office and a large salary; it's so they can carry out the vision and accomplish things. "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15). Being made in God's image doesn't only mean we are the crown jewel of creation; it also means we are the caretakers for creation. We are responsible for ruling and stewarding this world he made, filling the earth, and subduing it.

I have a friend who works at a large company—tens of thousands of employees. He runs a small team, but comparatively speaking, he's a very low man on the totem pole. There are fourteen layers between him and the leader. But he's an expert on tariffs, and with all the recent geo-political tariff talk happening, he got an email from the leader of the entire company who wanted to meet with him and give him an assignment. Hopefully we take all our assignments seriously, but when it's from the boss all the way at the top, we are going to do it well. How much more so when our responsibility comes from God! He's given us the task of ruling over, caring for, and stewarding creation. We don't want to take responsibility lightly.

Renewal

The image of God in mankind was dramatically impacted by sin. Sin corrupted our moral wiring, broke our relationship with God, hindered our relationship with others, and caused us to be inclined toward rebellion and destruction. His image is still on us after sin, but it's diminished and marred. Think about the Sistine Chapel. It's estimated that Michelangelo spent 26,000 hours painting it in the early 1500s. But 500 years of dirt, soot, and pollution caused its beauty and luster to fade. In the late 1900s it underwent restoration. It took 14 years, but you can see the difference. All the original beauty was restored. That's what God plans to do with us, and he's done it through Jesus.

Colossians 1:15 says, “Jesus is the image of the invisible God.” When you look at Jesus—perfect love, perfect wisdom, perfect grace, perfect relationship with the Father, immune to the allure of sin—that’s what God intended for all humanity. “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29). One day, God the Father will make us like God the Son. He will restore his image in us, making us like Jesus, restoring our perfect relationship with our Father, so we can walk completely free from sin, love one another, and enjoy life for all eternity. That is our hope! 1 John 3:2-3 says, “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.”