

GOD'S IMAGE IN THE NATIONS

+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

All people possess value, having been made in the image of God.

+ BACKGROUND PASSAGES:

Genesis 5; Psalm 139; Luke 10:25-37; 2 Corinthians 3

+ SETTING:

One key to fully comprehending the wrath and judgment of God is to grasp the nature of humanity. The Bible begins with the story of creation. Filled with many astounding details of how God formed this world and all He filled it with, it is easy to miss one colossal truth embedded within the creation narrative. When God made humankind, He did something different. Every other action was performed without one critical factor found only in the creative act of Adam and Eve, namely, God fashioned humans in His image. Both male and female were constructed to reflect who God is, providing humankind with a unique and special status within all of God's work.

DAY 1

READ:

Psalm 139

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 139:13-14

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"People were created in the image of God, to reflect the glory of God. 'The heavens declare the glory of God' and so also 'the earth is full of his glory' (Psalm 19:1; Isaiah 6:3), but in the beginning it was the man and the woman, the ones created in God's image, who most clearly and brightly and purely shone with the glory of God. As they stood upon the earth, bearing God's image, they bore a true witness to the existence and the excellence of God. What a great tragedy it was when the man and woman lost the clearness and brightness and pureness of that image by their sin."¹

-Nancy E. Ganz

Back in 2005, a new online e-commerce site emerged. Created by a group of amateur artisans, Etsy® provided a dedicated marketplace for handmade, hand-crafted, and vintage items. Before Etsy arrived, quality crafted items had to compete within the online spaces that included brand-new items produced in bulk. Alongside one another, the price disparity can be shocking, not to mention that merchants flood the markets with cheap imitations and quickly built knock-offs that won't stand the test of time.

Etsy took off quickly. Not only did it provide a space for artisans to more easily highlight and sell their work, it also gave consumers a honed-in arena to find the unique and quality pieces they may be looking for. When the consumer heads to Amazon®, he is looking for a steal-of-a-deal. When a shopper buys from Etsy, she is making an investment in a distinctive product to enjoy for years to come.

Psalm 139 is a captivating account of the meticulous efforts God took to create David. Indeed, this is a testimony to God's careful creation of each of us. There is no flippancy or cutting of corners involved. The bottom line is not about dollars and cents but about establishing worth and wonder. The Lord exhibits great care and intentionality to create every person as a unique and valuable masterpiece: "for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Eph. 2:10).

God is the master craftsman, the divine Creator, and He chose to create us, beautifully and intricately. He is worthy of our praise for how He created us.

What aspects of yourself might you struggle to recognize as God's care in His creation of you? For what aspects of your creation will you praise the Lord today?

DAY 2

READ:

Genesis 1

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Genesis 1:26-27

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #28: IMAGE OF GOD IN HUMANITY

The image of God in humanity is understood as mirroring God's attributes in our nature, actions, and relational capacities. In Jesus, we see the true image of God. He perfectly mirrors God's attributes, fulfills God's will, and enjoys a perfect relationship with the Father. The Bible continues to speak of the image of God in humanity even after our fall into sin, even though our ability to rightly reflect God has been marred.

We're all on a journey to figure out who we are. This is seen acutely in the teenage years. Self-expression becomes an important part of life as teenagers experiment with hair color, clothing, music, even style of speech. It's like putting on a costume to see if it fits. Some kids end their freshman year with the cowboy look, only to return as a goth sophomore. It is innate within us to figure out who we are. And with the culture screaming at us, "You do you!" the pressure is real.

It is critical for each of us to figure out who we are. It can be okay to establish different "flavors" of personality and to express those variations through what we wear, how we spend our time, and how we set up our environments. However, we must recognize that ultimately God has already given us our identity. From the foundation of the world, we were all given the status of an image-bearer of God. Our existence is already wrapped up in who He is.

Therefore, when we don't know who God is, or we have His character mixed up, we become mixed up ourselves. If we see God as distant and weak, we will compensate by making much of our strengths and abilities. When our mind's eye views God as subject to the whims of the world instead of being the One who holds the universe together, it will lead us to think we can create our own rules.

Until we see ourselves for who we truly are—created, treasured, purpose-filled individuals who bear the very mark of God—we will wander and waste much energy trying to solve a puzzle we already have the answer to.

What will you do today to establish reminders in your life of who you already are as an image-bearer and child of God?

DAY 3

READ:

Luke 10:25-37

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Luke 10:36-37

NOTES

The definition of “neighborly” is dependent on the culture where you grew up. Be it in the southeastern United States, being kind to your neighbor might include sweet tea and casseroles delivered to your doorstep. In the western US, it probably involves minding your own business and keeping your mind open. In other countries, there is great honor in going to great lengths to show hospitality to those you encounter. Trying to pin down a definition for being “neighborly” is difficult.

Then there is the question the expert in the law asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). Is a “neighbor” restricted to living within a certain number of blocks? Does it include people outside my normal sphere of life? Are there further restrictions within that circle of proximity?

Through this parable, Jesus gives us a glimpse into the biblical perspective of who a neighbor is and what a neighbor does. He does not define a neighbor by ethnicity or proximity. The good neighbor highlighted in this story was a perfect stranger from a hated culture. To be a good neighbor has more to do with what you do than where you are (or are not) from.

So, then, what does a neighbor do? According to Jesus, a neighbor of merit is one who shows mercy. Compassion drove the neighbor in the parable to care for the hurting person. The Samaritan went to great lengths to rescue and bring restoration to the beaten traveler. If we want to follow in the footsteps of the figure Jesus provided, we too must have compassion for all we encounter.

Regardless of their address or background, we get to deliver the mercy of God to the proverbial doorstep of our neighbors’ hearts.

How would you define being neighborly to people you encounter throughout your life? How will you show the mercy of God to one image-bearer today?

DAY 4

READ:

Colossians 3

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Colossians 3:9-11

NOTES

Perhaps all this talk of image-bearing can seem a bit ethereal and unreachable. Thankfully, we have the example of Christ to guide our efforts toward becoming better image-bearers.

Hebrews 1:3 tells us that Jesus is the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of His nature. The Messiah came to earth—fully God and fully man—and lived a perfect human life. His perfect life was vital as it qualified Him to become the unblemished sacrifice for our sins. Only a perfect sacrifice was acceptable, which is why we needed the Lamb of God to die in our place. Not one of us could pay the penalty of our sins through our very blemished efforts.

But the perfect life of Christ has also provided an example for us to follow. So, as we follow in the footsteps of Jesus, we are walking out our identity as an image-bearer of God. Jesus, the exact expression of God's image, got it right every time. Everything He did and said pointed to the holy character of the Father. This too is our job as Christ-followers.

The role of an image-bearer is to reflect the character of the original image. We set our minds on things above, choose to put to death the deeds of the flesh, and intentionally put on the new self we've been given in Christ. This is the work of the image-bearer. We do everything in the name of the Lord as an act of worship for all He has done for us, all He is currently doing, and all He will continue to do.

As you look at the list of actions in Colossians 3, what do you need to adjust today so that you can walk in the footsteps of Jesus and become a better image-bearer?

DAY 5

READ:

2 Corinthians 3–4

FOCAL PASSAGE:

2 Corinthians 4:1-4

NOTES

As believers in Christ, we live a “therefore” life. The Bible is filled with incredible truths of who God is and all He has done. This is primarily what the Scripture is all about. Every reader, then, gets to choose how to respond to these truths about God. Christians wholeheartedly embrace these truths, and with this embrace, we are given a new purpose—all of life becomes worship to the one true and living God.

Worship at its essence is simply a response to something or someone. Choosing to worship God is a determination to live a life that responds to who He is and what He’s done. Being a recipient of mercy brings with it a responsibility to respond to that mercy. The Bible provides the answer for what this looks like, namely, obedience. The commands we tend to turn into checklists of achievement are actually invitations to worship God for who He is and what He’s done.

- Christ has saved me from my sin; therefore . . .
- I have been given glorious gifts of grace; therefore . . .
- The Spirit has brought me freedom; therefore . . .
- I am made in the image of the glorious God of the universe; therefore . . .
- My eternal destiny is secure; therefore . . .
- I am being transformed into Christ’s perfect likeness; therefore . . .

As redeemed Christians, we are given incredible purpose for our lives. If the end goal of our salvation is simply our salvation, there would be no need for us to remain on this earth. Yet here we are. We are still here because we have work to do for the sake of God’s glory among the lost.

We live a “therefore” life—a life that honors God—in order that those who are perishing would see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ within us.

What are some ways you will show the light of Christ to others this week?

GROUP

NOTES

POINT 1: All people are made in the image of God (Gen. 5:1-2; Ps. 139:13-16).

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #28: IMAGE OF GOD IN HUMANITY

The image of God in humanity is understood as _____ God's attributes in our nature, _____, and relational capacities. In Jesus, we see the true image of God. He perfectly mirrors God's attributes, fulfills God's will, and enjoys a perfect relationship with the Father. The Bible continues to speak of the image of God in _____ even after our fall into sin, even though our ability to rightly reflect God has been _____.

? What are some implications of knowing God made every human being in His image?

God alone _____ and _____ life. With intricate care, He fashions people in His image so that we would _____ Him alone all our days.

POINT 2: All people are valued because they are made in the image of God (Luke 10:25-37).

Image-bearers are called to love _____ and love _____ as themselves. We should not put _____ on who is our neighbor and pass them by.

Since _____ people are made in God's image, they have inherent value, no matter their history or heritage. Therefore, like the good Samaritan, we should show _____ and _____ to everyone.

? What are some ways we can prove ourselves to be good neighbors?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Every human being resembles his or her Creator in some way. Consequently, every human being is special and important. We should be able to recognize the Creator in the men and women we see around us."²

-Barnabe Asshoto
and Samuel Ngewa

POINT 3: All believers are being transformed into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:17-18).

_____ human being is made in the image of God, though this has been marred by sin. But believers in Jesus are being _____ to that image through the freeing work of the Holy Spirit.

? How does sin keep people from experiencing freedom?

Through the gift of the Holy Spirit to believers, we are directed to continually behold the _____ of God in _____. In this way, the Spirit transforms us to resemble more closely the perfect image of our _____.

? What are some ways we need to work on beholding the glory of God in Christ?

MY RESPONSE

Because every person is an image-bearer of God, we seek to love and value all others and stand against all sin that fails to honor another person's inherent dignity.

- **HEAD:** What are some ways the image of God in humanity should change the way we interact with the people we encounter each day?
- **HEART:** Who are some image-bearers about whom you will pray for the Lord to soften your heart that you might show them compassion and share the gospel of Jesus?
- **HANDS:** What are some ways you will stand up for the inherent dignity of others this week because they are made in the image of God?

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"That good Samaritan represents your Christ and mine. He came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost . . . Oh, come tonight to the Son of God, and He will have compassion on you, and take you off from the dunghill, and transform you, and lift you up into His kingdom, into the heights of His glory, if you will only let Him!"³

-D. L. Moody (1837-1899)

GROUP LIFE ACCELERATES DISCIPLESHIP

A recent survey by Southwestern Seminary revealed a disturbing trend among churchgoers. The results released prior to the COVID-19 pandemic revealed a fierce independence among God's people. Sixty-five percent (65%) of 2,500 churchgoers surveyed agreed with the statement "I can walk with God without other believers."¹ Perhaps one could go it alone in his or her growth as a disciple, but it would not be wise to do so.

GROUPS HELP US GROW

We can see the benefits of group life in the book of Acts. The earliest Christians met in two kinds of groups: large-group gatherings in the temple courts for worship and smaller groups in homes for prayer, fellowship, teaching, and ministry. Today, we continue this tradition of large and small-group gatherings that provide a place for continued spiritual growth.

Another set of research conducted by Lifeway for the Transformational Groups project revealed that people who are in groups grow in their discipleship at a greater rate than people not in groups. The research proved that people in groups serve more, give more, confess sin more, are more open to outsiders, and pray more than people who choose not to belong to a small group. To say it another way, group life accelerates your growth as a disciple.

HOW SHOULD WE GROW IN GROUPS?

The Transformational Groups research discovered that disciples grow in eight significant areas, spiritual disciplines important in the life of believers who want to become more Christlike:

- 1. Disciples engage with Scripture.** Believers engage in the study of the Scriptures because it's God's word given to us. Transformation can be recognized in a person when their mind is sharpened by the Bible, their perspective is shaped by the Bible, and their actions are directed by the Bible.
- 2. Disciples obey God and deny self.** Discipleship is the process of obedience to One who is in authority over you. In the research study, faithful believers prioritized God's desires over self-will. Transformation can be seen in them because they progressively set aside earthly delights for kingdom priorities.
- 3. Disciples serve God and others.** Jesus said that He came to serve and not be served—so must believers. The choice to serve others highlights a maturity of soul in that we allow the needs of others to trump our own needs. Transformation is evident when personal needs, and even dreams, are set aside for the needs we see in others.

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4. **Disciples share Christ.** Inherent to being a disciple of Christ is the making of other disciple-makers for Christ. Even with the need to live out the effects of the gospel, maturing believers know that proclaiming and sharing the message is a necessity. Transformation is evident when we talk about the source of it in our lives.

5. **Disciples exercise faith.** Can you measure a person's faith? Probably not. But you can see it when it is put into action. Believers participating in the research noted that they knew the importance of living by faith as opposed to by personal strength. Transformation is seen in believers when risk-aversion is set aside and our lives are characterized by faithful obedience to God's will.

6. **Disciples seek God.** A person becomes a disciple of Christ because they intend to follow Him and become like Him. A continuous hunger should arise from this life. Christ should always be our "first love." Transformation is seen when our desire is to know God more deeply and experience His work more fully.

7. **Disciples build relationships.** Our faith is personal but not private. Jesus established the church for our collective good and our collective growth. Humans are relational by design. As believers, our horizontal relationships should develop along with our vertical relationship with God. Transformation occurs when relational maturity is evident in our lives.

8. **Disciples live unashamed.** A person following Christ should be willing to publicize such a matter. The research noted that believers felt it appropriate, and even necessary, for others to know them as Christians and so be held accountable for a life exemplary of that name. Transformation is evident when a believer is unashamed in presenting their own life as being aligned with Christ.

The Christian life cannot be isolated. Regular group involvement introduces us to spiritual disciplines necessary for growth. As one pastor has said, "Preaching to make disciples is like going to the nursery and spraying crying babies with milk and saying you just fed the kids . . . Discipleship involves more than preaching and listening."² Spiritual transformation occurs when, in large group worship and in smaller groups, we relate to one another in love, accountability, and mutual encouragement centered on the Word of God.

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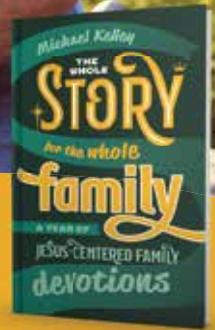
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FROM REBELLION TO EXILE

That the Lord is faithful to His promises should be comforting but simultaneously concerning, depending on one's own faith and faithfulness or the lack thereof. In 1 Kings to 2 Chronicles, the Israelites experienced firsthand the promise of God's discipline and judgment for rebellion—ultimately exile—but not without His mercy and patience to call His people back to Himself through His prophets. Groups will be reminded here that God does not tolerate sin, but He also responds to repentance with forgiveness and grace.

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