



Value: Reflecting on Our Image and Value Leaders' Notes



'The image of God in me, bows to the image of God in you.'

This is how people greet each other in Thailand, whilst bowing slightly with their hands together in front of them. But what does the phrase mean? And have we forgotten its' significance?

It was God's intention to design creatures that reflected His likeness in many ways. Man was to be the masterpiece of his creation, his most prized possession.¹

"Then God said, "Let us make human beings **in our image and likeness**. And let them rule over ... the earth..." Genesis 1:26-27 NCV

Dust and Breath

Our bodies were made merely from the 'dust of the earth'. To be more specific we are 65% oxygen, 18% carbon 10% hydrogen and so on'. To have put all that detail down in Genesis would have confused too many people for too long so 'dust' is a good generalization.

We were not made from gold dust – worth so much in the eyes of the world. Although for growing the food we need to survive, good quality 'dust of the earth' is of more value than gold dust. So the value of 'dust' is a little hard to define but it is seen as something extremely common.

There was nothing common about what God did with it though. We do not have the details of how he created all the other lifeforms, but when it came to creating Man, the Bible portrays the idea that it was up close and personal.

"Then the LORD God took **dust** from the ground and formed a man from it.

He **breathed the breath of life** into the man's nose, and the man became a living person²."

Genesis 2:7 NCV

God imprinted something of himself on Mankind. He was Adam's spiritual father as well as his creator. Adam was not God's son in that he shared all his powers and supernatural abilities, because clearly he did not. Adam was going to have to prove himself before being entrusted with anything *remotely* like that. But he was a true reflection of God's character, with an astonishing range of finite abilities. Adam and Eve were amazing – brilliant, beautiful, lovely people in every respect. They were true representatives of God on earth as the Hebrew word for 'image' implies.

*"Bound into that phrase (image and likeness) is a primary idea that there is the possibility of relationship with the God who made us. This gives human beings immense value, dignity, significance and worth. In a real sense there are no ordinary people."*³

¹ Ephesians 2:10, James 1:18: Although strictly speaking it is the restored version of Mankind that is God's masterpiece. Rev'd Professor Pavel Hanes

² Some translations have 'a speaking person.' Rabbi Sacks

³ Steve Brady

The Image of God in Human Beings

When we say that a son is the image of his father, we usually mean that he looks like him. But the Bible is not referring to physical appearance here, so to what does it refer? Whilst we do not know what Man was capable of before he broke away from God, we still retain plenty of his original features.

Let's consider the following:

1. Our sense of right and wrong with a passion for fairness and justice alongside a capacity to show mercy and compassion.
2. An ability to love in ways that put others first and are even self-sacrificing at times. At our best, we can love as described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.
3. Our spiritual senses. Even education systems recognise the need for spiritual development. There is a part of us that is able to appreciate beauty, music and has a sense of life outside of our own known physical environment as well as being able to have a relationship with the Spirit of God.
4. Our emotions including our sense of humour. Which of these do we get from God and which do we not? There is an astonishing overlap.
5. We are all gifted with a range of intelligences, which combined with imagination, creativity, initiative, and freedom of choice gives us the potential to do all sort of things both good and bad. This is regardless of whatever grades we may get at school
6. Our ability to communicate in very precise ways and different forms. Every language has hundreds of thousands of words. We found ways of taking these sounds and forming them into written languages, as well as combining them with other sounds to make songs.
7. Our capacity for understanding, our use of intuition and perception.

You may well be able to think of others.

Unique Reflections

Whilst we all reflect the image of God, we each do so in a slightly different way. This gives us a unique individual identity. We may not like everything about ourselves; few people in this fallen world do, but we are all priceless, Psalm 49:7-8.

“We have wounded your love, and marred your image in us.” *The Book of Common Prayer*

We only have to look around us, and at ourselves if we are honest, to see that something went very wrong. As Galatians 5:19-21 says in the Message, “It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time...” How do you think that sentence could end?

Living a holy life came naturally to Adam. “The original condition of man was one of positive holiness, not a state of innocence or moral neutrality”⁴

⁴ Berkhof

This puts the story of the Fall in a much worse light. When Man chose to break the boundaries God had set for him, he understood what he was doing, although he could not have foreseen the full implications and consequences of this. Although his moral nature was seriously damaged at this time, it was not destroyed. It is still a distinctive part of mankind. Even the most wicked people retain some goodness within them and are redeemable.⁵

How does this affect our value as human beings? What are we worth?

To understand our true value, we need to consider who has the ultimate right to decide this? Is it our friends, parents, teachers or the One who created Mankind?

The Bible says both positive and negative things about our worth.

1. Briefly:

Positive verses about us include:

Genesis 1:27 + Genesis 2:7b + Romans 5:7-8 + 1 Peter 1:18-19

They show us to be priceless

Negative verses about us include:

Genesis 2: 7a + Genesis 6: 5 + Romans 3:12 + Galatians 5:19-21

They show us to be worthless

2. What story does the Bible give about our image and value?

The numbering relates to how the verses appear in the PowerPoint.

1. Then God said, "Let us make human beings **in our image and likeness**. And let them rule over ... the earth..." Genesis 1:26-27 NCV
2. Then the LORD God took **dust** from the ground and formed a man from it. Genesis 2:7 NCV
3. He **breathed the breath of life** into the man's nose, and the man became a living person. Genesis 2:7 NCV
4. And we, out of all creation, became his **prized** possession. James 1:18 NLT
5. ... so we might be the **most important** of all the things he made. James 1:18 NCV
6. For we are **God's masterpiece** (handiwork/workmanship) ... Ephesians 2:10 NLT
7. The Lord saw that the human beings on the earth were **very wicked** and that everything they thought about was evil. He was sorry he had made human beings on the earth and his heart was filled with pain. Genesis 6:5 NCV
8. The wrong things the sinful self does are clear... Galatians 5 v.19-21 NCV
9. It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time... Msg
10. All have turned away, they have together **become worthless**; there is no one who does good, not even one. Romans 3:12 NIV. See also the Message

⁵ 2 Chronicles 33; Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:24

11. Cos God's so **passionate about** the planet that he donates his one and only Son. Whoever invests their life in his Son doesn't die but gets given this limitless life. John 3:16 Street Bible
12. "God loved the world so much that **he gave his one and only Son** so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal life. John 3:16 NCV
13. You were bought, not with something that ruins like gold or silver, but with the precious blood of Christ...1 Peter 1:18-19 NCV
14. Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. Ephesians 1:4-5 NLT
15. So all of us... can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And... he makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.⁶ 2 Corinthians 3:18 NLT

How can this influence our self-image and sense of value?

The Jewish rabbis have this saying: "Why was man created last? In order to say, if he is worthy, all creation was made for you; but if he is unworthy, he is told, even a gnat preceded you."

What can happen when our self-esteem is too high?

- Our focus is then on ourselves rather than on God and others.
- We become arrogant, conceited, and self-righteous.
- We may also treat others with contempt, forgetting that their value before God is the same as ours. (Proverbs 27:21)

One of Aesop's fables tells of a flea riding on the back of a chariot as it raced around the stadium. As the dust arose, both from the pounding of the horses' hooves, and from the turning of the wheels, the flea looked behind and exclaimed, "Oh, what a mighty dust storm I have raised!"

What can happen when our self-esteem is too low?

- Negative self-esteem is damaging to our all-round health and well-being.
- We may feel inferior to others, inadequate, insignificant, useless, or even depressed.
- We may find it hard to believe the promises of God or to develop the gifts he has given us.

Have we forgotten who we are?

Mirrors

Not only has our image become distorted from the original, but our way of evaluating ourselves has done so too. It's rather like trying to use the sort of mirrors they have at funfairs, to see what we look like, when they show us ourselves in all sorts of weird shapes.

In the film '*Ice Age 2 The Meltdown*', Ellie the mammoth tries hard to be a possum because having grown up with them, believes that she is one. When her new friend Manny is able to

⁶ "Being changed into the image of Jesus is more than returning back to the state Adam had. This is such a difficult but glorious theological point that even in Eden, Adam and Eve could not really imagine it." Rev'd Professor Pavel Hanes

show her a pool where she sees a much truer reflection of herself, she finally accepts that she is a mammoth and starts to live like a mammoth.

In trying to find our identity, do we use the right 'mirror'? Or do we use ones to see how we compare with other people? Are we ever going to see a true reflection of ourselves or what we are meant to be like by comparing ourselves with other people with regard to factors such as our appearance, our gifts/skills, our status/ popularity, or our possessions?

The Mirror of Jesus

To discover our true value, we need to look at Jesus. What can we see when looking at him? We can certainly see our shortfalls, but we can also see the beauty of man's character as he was originally. We can also see the sort of person we can become, if we ask God to restore us.

Conclusion/ Summary

1. It would radically change our view of both ourselves and of others, if we were to fully grasp the significance of the fact that we were designed to be a reflection of an Amazing God.
2. Ultimately, we are valuable because God has valued us.

"We are meaningful because God has created us, and he has determined that we would be meaningful to Him. This is the final definition of genuine significance."⁷

3. We are made in the image of God, but we don't live up to that. We are both worthless and priceless. We need to keep a balanced view with a neutral self-image. Max Lucado's story of the Wemmicks in 'You are Special' gives a simple picture of this.
4. We need to stay focused on Jesus rather than ourselves. Philippians 2:3-7.
5. If we allow God to work in our lives, we will become more and more like the beautiful people he created us to be.

It is an unchangeable fact that every child born has something of the image of God within them. It is far from a perfect image; it's very blurry in places. As we go through life, the choices we make affect whether that image improves in definition becoming clearer or whether it becomes so blurry it becomes unrecognisable. It's like a gold or silver hallmark – the fact that it is there even on an old tarnished item, makes it valuable. Giving it to a goldsmith to renew, means it can look valuable again and its' true value shine out. The most important choice we can make is to humbly ask God to forgive our wrongdoing and give us a new life in Jesus. We can then work with him to become an utterly amazing Child of God.

We are valuable because God has valued us and like the father in 'Finding Nemo' and the Prodigal son', he never lost hope of getting us back. It hurts to love people who reject you and mistreat you, but God has remained faithful over the centuries. There were times when he felt like giving up, but he didn't (e.g. Exodus 32:7-10). His love for us always remained firm. It can be measured by the fact that Jesus was prepared to suffer so much so that he could regain the precious relationship that he had with Mankind at the time of creation.

⁷ Wayne Grudem: Systematic Theology; page 162

Extra Discussion

- What distinguishes Man from all other living creatures?
- If all people are created in the image of God, do you think we can say there is beauty in all people?
- What does it mean for society if we believe that everyone is created in the image of God, not just certain groups?

Note: Where the term 'Man' is used, it is intended to mean Humans or Humankind. I have tried to use these terms but sometimes that can sound stilted.

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The last two extra discussion questions are taken from: <http://rabbisacks.org/cc-family-edition-bereishit-5779/>

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Street Bible (now called 'Word on the Street') Rob Lacey

ⁱ Most of the human body is made up of water - H²O, so a high percentage is oxygen.

1. Oxygen (65%)
2. Carbon (18%)
3. Hydrogen (10%)
4. Nitrogen (3%)
5. Calcium (1.5%)
6. Phosphorus (1.0%)

There is also a sprinkling of:

7. Potassium (0.35%)
8. Sulfur (0.25%)
9. Sodium (0.15%)
10. Magnesium (0.05%)
11. Copper, Zinc, Selenium, Molybdenum, Fluorine, Chlorine, Iodine, Manganese, Cobalt, Iron (0.70% in total)
12. Finally there are trace amounts of Lithium, Strontium, Aluminum, Silicon, Lead, Vanadium, Arsenic, and Bromine

For those who like to know these things!