



Value: Reflecting on Our Image 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 it mean?

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

Then the LORD God took **dust** from the ground and formed a man from it. Genesis 2:7 NCV
He **breathed the breath of life** into the man's nose, and the man became a living person¹.
Genesis 2:7 NCV

Dust and Breath

The Bible says we were made both from the dust of the earth and the breath of God.

To be more specific we are physically 65% oxygen, 18% carbon 10% hydrogen and so on. To have put all that 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 to farmers who grow the food we all need to survive, good quality 'dust of the earth' would be 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. However he made the rest of the world, when it came to creating Man, the Bible gives the sense that it was up close and personal – hands on – planning and forming every minute physical detail. Man was to be the masterpiece² of his creation, his most prized possession. For God said, "Let us make human beings **in our image and likeness**. And let them rule over ... the earth..." Ephesians 2:10, James 1:18

How had he brought the animals to life? We don't know. But with man "He **breathed the breath of life** into the man's nose, and the man became a living person."

In doing so God imprinted something of himself on Mankind. God 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. Human nature and God's nature were one and the same. Adam and Eve were amazing –

¹ Some translations have 'a speaking person.' Rabbi Sacks

² Although strictly speaking it is the restored version of Mankind that is God's masterpiece. Rev'd Professor Pavel Hanes

brilliant, beautiful, lovely people in every respect. In character they were much like Jesus. 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

Have we forgotten who we are?

Mirrors

If you look in funfair mirrors you will see yourself in all sorts of weird shapes. Sometimes an image can become so distorted it can be difficult to see what the original looked like. In trying to see what we do or should look like we use a range of different types of mirrors – mostly comparing ourselves with other people. Are you ever going to see a true reflection of yourself or what you are meant to be like by comparing yourself with other people?

What mirrors do we often use – perhaps: our appearance, our gifts or skills, our popularity?*

*These mirrors are explored in detail in the session on 'Value – Is My Self-Image Built on Sand?'

In **Ice Age 2: The Meltdown**, Ellie the mammoth has grown up with possums having lost her family when she was a baby. She therefore believes that she is a possum. When her new friend Manny is able to show her a pool where she sees a much truer reflection of herself she finally accepts that she is a mammoth. You can talk about the story even if you are not able to show a video clip.

To discover our true value, we need to first ask '**Who** has the right to decide this?' Is it our friends, parents, teachers or the One who created Mankind in the first place and who knew each of us before we were born? Psalm 139:15

Many people, even Christians, have lost sight of what it means to be made in the image of God. So what do we think this means? In what ways are we made in the image and likeness of God? We know that we inherited some of God's characteristics but which ones?

The Image of God in Human Beings

What do we mean 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?

God has many amazing features (attributes) and we certainly do not share all of them. See chart on page 8.

In what ways were humans intended to be like God? Fully / partly / not at all

How is Mankind both similar to but different from God?

When they broke faith with God, did that take all that away? Some but not all – Genesis 9:6

Whilst it is difficult to know what man's capacity was before he broke away from God, we still retain enough of the original to distinguish us from every other creature.

³ Steve Brady

Consider the following:

Abilities: 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

Personality: Whilst our capacity to love is not as strong and as constant as God's, we can still love some people to the point where we are prepared to make huge sacrifices for them.

Emotional beings: We have a wide range of complex emotions including a sense of humour.

Moral Nature: Living a holy life came naturally to Adam. He instinctively knew right from wrong. *"The original condition of man was one of positive holiness, not a state of innocence or moral neutrality"* Berkhof. This puts the story of the Fall in a much worse light. When Man chose to disobey God, 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, such as King Manasseh and other tyrants, retain some goodness within them and are redeemable. 2 Chronicles 33; Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:24

Spiritual Beings: Humans are spiritual beings with a soul that can exist without a body, but needs both in order to be complete and to enjoy life to the full. They cannot function properly without both. Some will eventually have a physical body that is far superior to the one we have now. See 1 Timothy 6:16 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-54

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

How much did Man's rebellion change this?

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..." (or in the NCV "The wrong things the sinful self does are clear...") Our image has become very distorted from the original.

Rather than read the whole of Galatians 5:19-21 with your group, ask them how they think that sentence could end. That will also make it easier to make it age appropriate.

How much are we worth if we consider the amazing fact that we are made in the image of God?

How much are we worth if we look at the way we have behaved and treated both God and each other?

Not only has our image become distorted but our way of evaluating ourselves is also distorted and seriously inaccurate.

What does the Bible say about our image and our value? www.biblegateway.com

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

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
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.⁴ 2 Corinthians 3:18 NLT

Other verses relevant to value are quoted at the end.

⁴ "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

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

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 also 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.

The Jewish rabbis have this to say: "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."

Rabbi Simcha Bunim used to say to his students: "Everyone must have two pockets, with a note in each pocket, so that he or she can reach into the one or the other, depending on the need. When feeling low, discouraged or disconsolate, one should reach into the right pocket, and, there, find the words: *For my sake was the world created*. But when feeling high and mighty one should reach into the left pocket and find the words: *I am but dust and ashes*."

The Mirror of Jesus

To discover our true value we need to look at Jesus.

What do Christians see when looking at Jesus?

- We see the beauty of original Mankind, the sort of person/character we were created to be.
- We see the person we are not – he shows up our failings and worthlessness.
- We see someone who has suffered much and in many ways because he loves us.
Genesis 6:5; Matthew 23:37; Isaiah 53
- We see the one who paid the price on the cross for us to be reborn into the image of God.
- We see the person we can become if we ask God to work at restoring us to be the person he created us to be – which is God's own plan for us. Jeremiah 29:11

Conclusion/ Summary

“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.”⁵

Like the father in ‘Finding Nemo’ 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.

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 then look valuable again; its’ true value can then 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 a truly amazing Child of God.

1. 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 these 2 facts in balance as far as possible.
2. Ultimately we are valuable because God has valued us.
3. The healthiest state for our self-image to be in is neutral, focusing on God and others.
4. If we stay focused on Jesus rather than ourselves, our self-image should be balanced. (Philippians 2:5-11).
5. If we allow God to work in our lives we will become more and more like the beautiful people we were created to be.
6. It would radically change our outlook of both ourselves and of others, if we were to fully grasp the implications of the truth that our original design was in the image of an Amazing God,
7. It’s worth taking some time to reflect on this.

⁵ Wayne Grudem: Systematic Theology; page 162

<i>In What Ways Do We Reflect God?</i>		
God	Humans	
	Yes/No	In Part
As a Force		
Spirit		
Self-existent/totally independent		
Eternal		
Immortal		
Infinite		
All-present		
All-powerful		
Unchangeable		
As a Thinking Being		
Intelligent		
All-knowledge		
Understanding		
Wisdom		
Moral Nature		
Holy and righteous		
Just - completely fair		
Merciful		
Gracious and kind		
Faithful and true		
Personal Features		
Free will		
Creative		
Imaginative		
Sense of humour		
Other?		
Having Emotions		
Love		
Grief		
Anger		
Joy		
Pity/Compassion		
Sadness		
Jealousy		
Hate		

Extra**Other Bible verses relevant to value**

No one can buy back the life of another. No one can pay God for his own life, because the price of a life is high. No payment is ever enough. Psalm 49:7-8 NCV

I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; Isaiah 49:16 NIV

Two sparrows cost only a penny, but not even one of them can die without your Father's knowing it. God even knows how many hairs are on your head. So don't be afraid. You are worth much more than many sparrows. Matthew 10:29-31 NCV

You all were bought at a great price, so do not become slaves of people. 1 Corinthians 7:23 NCV

What does it mean by 'slaves of people'?

Everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's glorious standard, Romans 3:23 NCV

No one's innocent. We've all messed up and dropped well short of God's target for us. Romans 3:23 Street Bible

God chose 'the foolish'... the weak... the unimportant... 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

You have begun to live the new life, in which you are being made new and are becoming like the One who made you. Colossians 3:10 NCV

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?

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