

# The Weight of Glory

## Humanity

In *The Story Begins*, the first workbook in the Experiencing God's Story series, we looked at the Bible as God's inspired Word, our need to study the Bible, and the resulting virtues of truth telling and truth living. Next, we explored the mysterious but amazing conviction that God is Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit living in an eternal relationship of self-giving love. When we accept God's offer to join his community or fellowship, we begin to allow his love to define our lives. We continued our journey by thinking about God as both good and great, a conviction that calls for a response of authentic worship—a practice that cultivates in us the quality of holiness or purity. The next page in God's grand story moves the focus from God himself to his most precious creation—human beings. Because we have been created in the image of God, we bear an enormous “weight of glory” as C. S. Lewis explains:

It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbour. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbour's glory should be laid on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken. It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. . . . There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours. (*The Weight of Glory*, 45–46)

The “weight” or “burden” of glory is Lewis's memorable way of describing the biblical conviction that human beings have been created in the image of God.

## 36 Life Essentials

### BELIEVING

- Authority of the Bible
- Triune God
- Great and Good God

### ► Humanity

- Satan and Sin
- Jesus Christ
- Salvation
- Holy Spirit
- The Church
- Transformation
- Mission
- The End

### BEHAVING

- Studying the Bible
- Fellowshipping
- Worshipping
- Seeking the Kingdom
- Waging Spiritual War
- Following
- Trusting and Acting
- Walking by the Spirit
- Serving
- Praying
- Engaging the World
- Persevering

### BECOMING

- Truth
- Love
- Purity
- Rest
- Freedom
- New Identity in Christ
- Assurance
- Fruit of the Spirit
- Humility
- Peace
- Compassion
- Hope

## THE POWER OF WORDS

“**image and likeness**”—Older biblical scholarship believed that “image” and “likeness” were different. They claimed that “image” referred to the characteristics of personhood that remained after Adam and Eve sinned, while the “likeness” was destroyed by sin. Recent (and better) biblical scholarship says that these two parallel words are communicating a single idea—humans bear God’s stamp. We were created with some capacity to mirror God, to be and act like him. We were made in his image or likeness.

## Made in God’s Image

Although there are only a few Scriptures that assert that we have been created in God’s image, they are crystal clear and powerful.

When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them “man.” (Gen. 5:1b–2)

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man. (Gen. 9:6)

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. (James 3:9–10)

## A Closer Look—Genesis 1:26–28

To these three we add our focal passage for this study:

<sup>26</sup>Then God said, “Let us make man in our *image*, in our *likeness*, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

<sup>27</sup>So God created man in his own *image*,  
in the *image* of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup>God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

## SCRIPTURE NOTES

The three image-of-God passages in Genesis occur at very significant points in the story.

- Genesis 1—the high point of creation;
- Genesis 5—the new start following Adam and Eve’s fall into sin;
- Genesis 9—the new beginning after the judgment of the flood.

These locations tell us that the “image of God” is crucial to God’s plan and vital for us to understand. Since the Bible never explicitly tells us what the “image” is, there have been many attempts to define the “image” (too many to list here). Rather than trying to define what the image is, we are better off looking at what the image involves. For example, what privileges or responsibilities does it carry? As humans made in God’s image, what are we supposed to do or not do? Use the questions below to help you get a better feel for what the image of God involves.

1. What does Genesis 1:26–28 suggest that the image of God involves?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What do you learn about the image of God from the surrounding context (Genesis 1–2)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. As you look at Genesis 5 and 9 and James 3, what do you learn about the image of God?

## Crossing the Bridge

Remember, we cross the bridge from the ancient world to our world by identifying timeless theological truths that God is communicating. Here are a few principles related to the image of God. Be careful; taking these truths seriously will radically change your life.

- *All human beings (not just Christians) have value and dignity.* We are important because of who we are (created as important by God). We are not the mere products of naturalistic evolution. People deserve respect, and human life should be regarded as sacred.

### **Not Worthless, Only Lost**

G. K. Chesterton somewhere says that the hardest thing to accept in the Christian religion is the great value it places upon the individual soul. Still older Christian writers used to say that God has hidden the majesty of the human soul from us to prevent our being ruined by vanity. This explains why even in its ruined [or sinful] condition a human being is regarded by God as something immensely worth saving. Sin does not make it worthless, but only lost.

—Dallas Willard,  
*Renovation of the Heart*, 46

## An Object Lesson

So the spies questioned him: “Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” He saw through their duplicity and said to them, “Show me a denarius [a Roman coin]. Whose portrait and inscription are on it?” “Caesar’s,” they replied. He said to them, “Then give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

—Luke 20:21–25

What does Jesus’ response to the tricksters teach us about the image of God?



## Feeling Blue?

If you are feeling discouraged, read Psalm 8. To our surprise, God thinks highly of us.

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

—Psalm 8:3–8

- *We belong to God.* We are not our own. We need God and will only find our ultimate fulfillment in God. We were meant to be God’s, not gods.
- *We were created for relationships and community.* If we have been created in the image of the triune God who enjoys an eternal fellowship of love, then we too need relationships—with God and other human beings.
- *We have been granted both freedom and responsibility.* We are charged with “ruling” and “subduing” creation (Gen. 1:28). We are free to make real choices that affect the direction and destiny of our lives and others’ lives. God intends for us to cooperate with him in faithfully managing creation.
- *We have been created male and female.* In an age of gender confusion, we need to know how important gender clarity is to God. We are created to live as either male or female and to interact with the other gender in a complementary partnership.
- *Sin may distort the image, but it does not destroy it.* Even after human beings chose to sin, they were told not to kill (Gen. 9) or curse (James 3) people because they have been made in God’s image.
- *The image of God is perfectly manifested in Jesus Christ.*

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Cor. 4:4)

He is the image of the invisible God. (Col. 1:15)

The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being. (Heb. 1:3)

- *Christ followers are renewed in the image of God.* As a result of our relationship with Jesus Christ, the image of God given at creation is being renewed and restored in us.

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Rom. 8:29)

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:18)

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph. 4:22–24)

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. (Col. 3:9–10)

When God created us in his image, he gave us dignity and value, entrusted us with significant freedom and responsibility, and gave us the privilege of relating to him. In Christ, the image of God is being restored in us. In sum, in Christ we are becoming fully human!

Brennan Manning tells a story about Ed Farrell, who traveled from his home in the United States to spend two weeks with his uncle, who lived in Ireland. His uncle was celebrating his eightieth birthday. Early on the morning of his birthday, Ed and his uncle took a walk along the shore of Lake Killarney, enjoying the beautiful scenery. For twenty minutes they walked in silence, captivated by the moment. Then his uncle began to do a strange thing for an eighty-year-old man—he began to skip along the shore like a young boy. When Ed caught up with him, he asked, “Uncle Seamus, you look very happy. Do you want to tell me why?” “Yes,” said the old man, his face covered in tears. “You see, the Father is very fond of me. Ah, me Father is so very fond of me” (Manning, *Wisdom of Tenderness*, 25–26). Do you get it? The God who created you in his image is very fond of you!

### So What?

1. Describe what you assume God thinks or feels when he thinks about you.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Is there anything that keeps you from realizing (with both your mind and your heart) that the Father is very fond of you?

### Admitting Our Limits

We aren't God and *never* will be. We are humans. It is when we try to be God that we end up most like Satan, who desired the same thing. We accept our humanity intellectually, but not emotionally. When faced with our own limitations, we react with irritation, anger, and resentment. We want to be taller (or shorter), smarter, stronger, more talented, more beautiful, and wealthier. We want to have it all and do it all, and we become upset when it doesn't happen. Then when we notice that God gave others characteristics we don't have, we respond with envy, jealousy, and self-pity.

—Rick Warren,  
*Purpose-Driven Life*, 79

