

THE BIG JOURNEY

from Creation to New Creation



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three ► In God's Image

Who are we?

Oswald Chambers once pointed out that “the most marvellous thing in the whole of creation” is not the heavens, the moon and the stars – it is *ourselves*. We humans are “*fearfully and wonderfully made*” (Psalm 139.14); God “*crowned*” mankind “*with glory and honour*” (Psalm 8.5).

And the most amazing thing about us is this: God made us “*in his own image*” (Genesis 1.27). But what does this really mean? And why did He create us? What did He create us for? And who are the angels - those other amazing beings we encounter in the Bible? We'll pause for a moment on our journey and try to answer these questions.

Original glory

When we think about mankind, what springs to mind? Perhaps we think of our troubled world - corrupt, polluted, soiled by sin and ravaged by war.

But mankind wasn't sinful at the beginning. The first humans began their lives spotless and innocent. Ever since Adam and Eve's fall, of course, sin has damaged and scarred us. But even now, in our essential nature, we are still in God's image and likeness (see Genesis 9.6, James 3.9).

And God is restoring His people to bear His image perfectly (see Ephesians 4.24, Colossians 3.10). Our

pattern is Jesus Christ. He shows us what God always intended mankind to be like. In His selfless love, His unpretentious dignity and calm authority; in His penetrating insight, His cloudless fellowship with His Father and His simple unquestioning obedience to Him, we see what God wants us all to be. One day, we'll be like Him (1 John 3.2)!

What is the image of God?

After He had made everything else, God said: *"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness"* (Genesis 1.26, and see Genesis 5.1).

What does it mean to be in God's image and likeness? We aren't actually divine, of course. But we are as *like* God as it is possible for any created being to be. Derek Kidner explains it this way: we're an expression or 'transcription' of the eternal bodiless Creator in terms of time-bound, bodily, creaturely existence.

God made Man

We are made in God's image. We are a true expression of God's nature and character. And so our human nature is, in some wonderful way, *compatible* with God's nature. And because of this God could – without ceasing to be fully God – become human, too. That's exactly what happened when Jesus became Man. He humbled Himself to take human flesh (compare Philipians 2.7). But He didn't *humiliate* Himself.

Notice that Genesis 1.27 links being in God's image to being male and female: *"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."* Each individual person is in God's image (Genesis 9.6, James 3.9). But only *male and female together* express the full range and richness of that image.

Our personality and abilities

So how do we humans reflect God? Like God, we are *personalities*. We have a rational *mind*. We express *emotions*. We have a *will* – we choose what to say and do. We reflect God in having moral capacity – a knowledge of what is right and wrong. Like God, too, we speak.

God is creative, and so are we. We can't create out of nothing, as God can. But we can procreate. We reflect God in being imaginative, inventive, artistic. We mirror God in our aesthetic senses that *recognise* and praise beauty wherever we find it.

Our relationships

But there's another very special way in which mankind reflects God. God is Triune – He is One, yet He is also Three Persons. In Donald Macleod's words, *"There is a social life in the Godhead . . . The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit live in community and fellowship."* The



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An ethnic fair in the United States. We are social beings – wired for relationship with God, and with each other.

Father loves the Son (for example, John 3.35). The Son loves the Father (John 14.31). And, as Michael Reeves puts it, *"the Spirit stirs up the delight of the Father in the Son and the delight of the Son in the Father, inflaming their love and so binding them together in 'the fellowship of the Holy Spirit' . . ."* In fact, God is love (1 John 4.8,16). Love is, so to speak, at the very root of Who He is.

We humans are made in God's image. And so love is at the root of what it means to be human, too. At the very heart of our beings is the capacity for *love*. We are *relational* beings. We find our true fulfilment and greatest joy in loving other people and, above all, in loving God. When we love God and love each other - selflessly and sacrificially - then we are being truly human, as God intended us to be.

Think how remarkably God has set us humans up for relationship. God created man *"male and female"* - designed to enjoy the lifelong intimacy of marital union. And God said, *"Be fruitful and multiply . . ."*. We are to achieve God's mandate of filling the Earth through *intimate relationship* - the union of a man and his wife, and the love between them and their children.

In the last session we looked at the first two chapters of Genesis. These creation narratives point out our relational nature in a number of ways:

► **God speaks to mankind** (Genesis 2.16-17, Genesis 1.28-30). He relates to him.

► **God's name changes in Genesis 2.4.** Before we see how God created man and woman in Genesis 2, we learn that God is a *relational* God. We know this because Moses, the author of Genesis, begins to use a different name for God. He uses a name that is *personal* and *relational*.

● In Genesis 1.1-2.3, he uses the simple name *"God"*. The Hebrew word for *"God"* here is *'Elohim'*; it expresses God's sovereign omnipotence.

● But when Moses describes how God created the first man and woman, he calls Him *"the LORD God"*. The name *'Elohim'* is now combined with *"LORD"*, which translates the Hebrew word *Yahweh*. This is a 'relational' name. It reveals God as the personal God Who is present with His people and Who relates to them.

► **God gave Adam 'the kiss of life'**. When God created Adam, He *"breathed into his nostrils the breath of life"* (Genesis 2.7). As Adam awoke into consciousness he found God, so to speak, bending over him and lovingly kissing him into being. Adam's very first experience was intimacy with God.

► **The creation of Eve.** In Genesis 2.18 God says: *"It is not good that the man should be alone"*. To be alone is *"not good"* - we are *relational* beings. Specifically, Adam needs a partner who will fill the 'void' in his heart, someone who will 'complete' him. So God creates the woman - *"a helper comparable to him"* (Genesis 2.18 NKJV).

Children of God

In Genesis 5.3 we read that Adam *"fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth."* The Hebrew words translated *"image"* and *"likeness"* are the same as those translated *"image"* and *"likeness"* in Genesis 1.27, when God speaks about creating mankind.

So here is another aspect of the image of God. Adam's son Seth was *"in his own likeness, after his image"*. Our own children, too, are in our 'image'; they bear a family 'likeness'. God the Father 'fathered' our race into being; we were created as members of His 'family'. We are in the *"image"* of God the Father; we bear His family *"likeness"*.

Even in their fallen state, people still bear God's image (Genesis 9.6, James 3.9). In that sense they still bear a family likeness to Him. But through *spiritual* birth (John 3.3,7, 1 Peter 1.23), we become God's children again in the way He always intended. John writes: *"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. . . . Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, . . ."* (1 John 3.1-2). As Michael Reeves puts it: *"The Father so delighted in his Son that his love for him overflowed, so that the Son might be the firstborn among many sons"*. God has predestined His people *"to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers"* (Romans 8.29).



A naval officer embraces his newborn son for the very first time on his arrival in Hawaii after a six-month deployment. Children are the 'image' of their parents. They bear a family 'likeness'. We humans, too, bear the *"image"* and *"likeness"* of God. And how precious must be this little baby to his father. We are very precious to God.



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Michelangelo's famous painting of the creation of Adam. This is part of the fresco on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, painted by Michelangelo between 1508 and 1512.

Born to rule

Notice, too, how Genesis 1.26 links our being in God's image to dominion. God said, *"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion . . ."* (Genesis 1.26, and see Psalm 8.3-8).

Helmer Ringgren tells us, *"The rulers of the ancient Near East set up images and statues of themselves in places where they exercised or claimed to exercise authority. The images represented the ruler himself as symbols of his presence and his authority. . ."* God the King rules over this Earth. We are His 'images' and represent our King here on Earth.

We're God's viceroys, appointed to rule Earth on His behalf. God placed us here to care for and guard His garden sanctuary, and extend its boundaries till it filled the whole globe.

But we weren't to do this on our own. God intended us to rule Earth in *fellowship* with Him and in *dependence* on Him. We were to be God's *co-workers*, guided and empowered in our task by His Spirit.

"In Him we live"

1 We depend on Him

We are *created* beings – and so we depend on God our Creator for everything. In Him *"we live and move and have our being"* (Acts 17.28). Moment by moment He gives us life and breath (Acts 17.25).

Of course, *all* creation depends on God. But the lower orders of life - animals and plants - do so unconsciously. It's our privilege to live in conscious daily awareness and acknowledgement of our reliance on God.

2 We are precious to God

We are very precious to God. Every one of us is in God's

image, and possesses the value and dignity which that image confers.

Jesus said: *"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"* (Matthew 16.26). Jesus asks us to compare our souls - our 'selves' - against *"the whole world"*, or what one commentator describes as: *"all the world's wealth, power, pleasure, glory, . . . all enjoyments, all achievements, all satisfactions."* And Jesus assures us that each individual person is far more valuable than all of this! The thought is quite breathtaking.

Derek Prince wrote: *"For more than fifty years, I have tried to help people with innumerable problems in their lives. Eventually, I have come to a surprising conclusion: our basic problem as human beings is that we do not realize how valuable we are."*

And our value has profound implications for how we live – what we do with our bodies, what we fill our minds with, how we use our gifts and how we spend our time.

And if I'm so valuable, then so is my friend and my neighbour - and so is my enemy. This truth must govern how we treat each other (compare Genesis 9.6 and James 3.9-10).

3 God knows us intimately

The psalmist exclaimed: *"My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."* (Psalm 139.15-16 NIV).

Every hair of our head is numbered (Matthew 10.30). God perceives our thoughts, feels our joys and

contemplates our sorrows. He understands our secret longings; He knows our hidden fears. He is acquainted with all of our ways (Psalm 139.3).

I am a house

At the Last Supper, Jesus said: *"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."* (John 14.23). God created us in such a way that there's room in each of us for Him to take up residence. If we love Him and obey His word, God will come and live inside us.

The body of a child of God is a temple of the Triune God. God's Spirit lives in them (1 Corinthians 6.19, Galatians 4.6). And through the Spirit, the Father and the Son live in them, too (see John 14.23, Ephesians 3.17, Colossians 1.27).

We are a family



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A family at the meal table. Humanity isn't a group of unrelated individuals, but a family. We're all connected. Fellowship and friendship and love are basic to what it means to be human.

God created only Adam directly (Genesis 2.7). Every other human came from Adam. God made Eve from Adam's body (Genesis 2.21-23). Every other human (with the exception of Jesus) is the offspring of Adam and Eve. Jesus, too, was biologically related to Adam through His mother Mary, but not through his foster-father Joseph.

This makes us different from angels. They, in contrast, *"neither marry nor are given in marriage"* (Matthew 22.30). God seems to have created each angel separately.

So we're not a group of unrelated individuals, but a family *"from one man"* (Acts 17.26). We're all connected. Each of us is shaped by our involvement in the human race, by genetics and by family and friends. That's why John Donne could write: *"No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. . . . any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."*

The Church – God's new humanity

When the New Testament speaks about the church as a body with many members, as God's household (Ephesians 2.19) and family, this isn't a completely new idea. God built it into human nature right from the very beginning.

And because we're all one family, fellowship and friendship and love are basic to what it means to be human. We instinctively want to feel part of a group. We need to belong. We fear exclusion, isolation and loneliness. Without human companionship and intimacy we find it hard to live. Watch any soap opera or read most novels - what's the dominant theme? Relationships. They're the stuff of life.

John Eldredge writes: *"Aren't the greatest joys and memories of your life associated with family, friendship, or falling in love? Aren't your deepest wounds somehow connected to someone also, to a failure of relationship? That you were loved but are no longer, or that you never have been chosen? . . . So, too, our greatest sorrows stem from losing the ones we love. . . . Loneliness might be the hardest cross we bear. Why else would we have come up with solitary confinement as a form of punishment? We are relational to the core."*

Each of us is a unique personality. But our individuality isn't developed in isolation. It's formed only by interaction with others. An old proverb says *"it takes a village to raise a child"*. To grow up normally and thrive, every child needs a village - not just a family, but a community, a whole network of relationships.

We're only truly 'ourselves' – as God intended us to be - as we enjoy vibrant, loving relationships with God, and with our fellow human beings. Jesus said this: *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself."* (Matthew 22.37-39). To obey this command is the key to the abundant life that God wants for all of us.



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A typical scene in a traditional village in Papua New Guinea – sitting and talking, grooming a child's hair, feeding baby. An old proverb says *"it takes a village to raise a child"*. To grow up normally and well, every child needs a village - not just a family, but a whole community.

"My brother's keeper"

So mankind is a family; we're all connected. And this means that *we affect one another*. David Jeremiah comments: "Every one of us leaves our spiritual fingerprints, metaphorically speaking, on the lives of other people . . ." Conversely, those with whom we spend our time shape the way we ourselves think and act.

So we have the power to be a blessing to each other. I *am*

my brother's keeper (compare Genesis 4.9). In the church, God has given each of us gifts to build up our brothers and sisters in Christ (see 1 Corinthians 14.12,26, and see also Ephesians 4.11-16).

Conversely, we have power to harm each other. One person's sin can defile many (compare 1 Corinthians 5.6 and Hebrews 12.15). We hurt people by breaking off relationships, refusing to forgive. And the one we harm most by doing this is ourselves. That's one reason why Jesus commanded us so strongly to forgive one another.

Male and female



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"So God created man . . . male and female he created them." (Genesis 1.27). Man and woman complement each other perfectly. She completes him, and he in turn completes her.

God created the first woman in a unique way. He formed Adam from the dust of the ground. But God made Eve from Adam's body (Genesis 2.21-23). Adam was made of the earth. But Eve was one step removed from the earth - the radiantly beautiful member of the partnership!

Eve was made out of Adam's flesh. Then God gave Eve to Adam, and they became one flesh again (Genesis 2.24). Marriage is a flesh *union*, and a soul *communion*.

God formed the woman from a part of Adam's own body. Alec Motyer comments: ". . . the Lord God 'took a something from his sides'. Henceforth the male will only become complete by receiving back that which was taken from him. Likewise the female . . . will only 'come home', return to where and what she should be, by union with the male. Rightly, therefore, the narrative declares them to be . . . the male and female components of a single reality. This is not, of course, to say that the unmarried do not possess the image of God or are deficient in their enjoyment of humanness But this must be said: there is a distinct truth about the image of God in man expressed and safeguarded by the union of man and woman in marriage."

Woman perfectly complements the man and vice versa. Geoffrey Bingham observed that it is man's masculinity that etches a woman's femininity, as her femininity delineates his masculinity. She completes him, and he in turn completes her.

But the companionship of man and woman is not an end in itself. *It enables us to fulfil our God-given vocation*. God gave Adam his mandate to care for the garden (Genesis 2.15). God then created Eve to be "*a helper comparable to him*" (Genesis 2.18 NKJV).

The Hebrew word translated "*helper*" is 'ēzer. The translation "*helper*" is unfortunate, because it suggests an 'assistant', someone inferior in status. In fact, this word is most often used to describe the help that God provides (for example Psalm 20.2, 121.2). The woman to be the man's partner, one who matches him perfectly; his co-worker, supporting him in a task he couldn't do alone. There are areas in which she is more gifted than he, and vice versa. Both man and woman together (see Genesis 1.28) were to be fruitful, subdue the Earth and have dominion over every living creature.

There were to be areas of special male responsibility and areas of special female responsibility. But though there were differences of role, there was to be exact balance and perfect equality in the value that man and woman brought to the partnership. Eve was *"a helper comparable to him"*. The phrase 'comparable to' can also be translated 'corresponding to' or 'complementing'. It implies an exact match.

And this inter-dependence of the sexes goes beyond marriage. It embraces all kinds of male-female relationships – mother and son, father and daughter, brother and sister, male and female friend or co-worker. So it includes those who are unmarried for whatever reason (compare Matthew 19.10-12 and the parallel in Mark; 1 Corinthians 7.6-9, 25-40). *Man without woman - and woman without man - is incomplete in every realm of human activity and endeavour.* Geoffrey Bingham comments: *"In the vocation of the entire human race masculinity and femininity work with each other to achieve the mandate of God"*.



How are this man and woman related? The image's source doesn't say. The inter-dependence of the sexes goes beyond marriage to embrace all types of male-female relationships.

The covenant of marriage

In Genesis 2.24, we read *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."* Jesus quotes this verse (Matthew 19.5 and parallel in Mark), as does Paul (Ephesians 5.31).

The Hebrew words translated *"leave"* and *"hold fast"* here are terms that (among other things) are used in the context of a *covenant* between God and His people. For example, God commands His people to *"hold fast to him"* (Deuteronomy 10.20) – that's the same word as is translated *"hold fast"* in Genesis 2.24. In Deuteronomy 29.25, God speaks about His people *abandoning* the covenant He made with them: *"all the nations will say, 'Why has the LORD done thus to this land? . . . Then people will say, 'It is because they abandoned the covenant of the LORD, the God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt, . . .'"* The word *"abandoned"* is the same word as is translated *"leave"* in Genesis 2.24. So Genesis 2.24 is the language of *covenant* commitment. Marriage is a *covenant* relationship.

The word *"leave"* in Genesis 2.24 means 'forsake'. It doesn't necessarily mean that the husband should *leave* his parents and set up home somewhere else. In fact, in Israelite society, it was typically the wife (not the husband) who left home. It was the custom for the bride to come and join her husband in his father's compound.

The point being made in Genesis 2.24 is that the husband should 'forsake' his mother and father in this sense: *his obligations to his wife now take priority over his obligations to his parents.* For our society that seems obvious. But in Biblical terms it's very striking – remember that we are also commanded to honour our parents (see Exodus 20.12 and compare Matthew 15.4-6 and parallel in Mark).

The eternal Bride

As Tim Keller points out, *"our maleness or our femaleness is not incidental to our humanness, but is at its very essence"*. So this suggests that we will retain our sexual identity as men and women in the world to come.

But Jesus tells us that marriage is only temporary. In the world to come we'll be like the angels, who do not marry (Matthew 22.30). So if we do, in fact, retain our sexual identity in the New Heaven and Earth, how come marriage ends at death?

One reason is surely this: there will only be *one* marriage in the world to come. We, God's people, will all be married to Jesus Christ. We'll be His glorious Bride (see Ephesians 5.25-27, 31-32, Revelation 19.6-8, 21.9-27).

As we've said before, the Bible story is at its heart a love story. In Ephesians 5.31 Paul quotes Genesis 2.24, which speaks about the man and woman becoming one flesh. Paul then writes: *"This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church."* Earthly marriage, even at its most wonderful, isn't – so to speak – the *original* kind of marriage. It's a model, a reflection, an 'incarnation' of the original marriage. That original, 'archetypal' marriage is the union of Christ and His Church.

Another reason that marriage ends at death is doubtless this: earthly marriage is, by its nature, *exclusive*. It's a covenant bond between a man and woman that isn't open for others to share. But in the world to come, we'll be perfect. And with that perfection comes perfect relationships – relationships that are intimate, unclouded, transparent, pure.

Our relationships in that world will outshine even the most wonderful earthly marriage, as the sun outshines the moon and stars when morning comes. And we'll enjoy such perfect relationship with *many* people, not just with one person as it is in earthly marriage.

The exclusivity so integral to earthly marriage will be reserved for the one marriage that *will* last eternally - the marriage between Jesus and His Church.

Spirit, soul, body

Genesis 2.7 explains how God made man. He formed a human body from the dust of the ground. Then He breathed into this body *"the breath of life"* or, in Hebrew, *neshāmā chayyâ*. This phrase, as used here, is a close synonym of *rûach*, the usual Hebrew word for 'spirit'.

God breathes *"the breath of life"* - that is, a human spirit - into this man-shaped lump of dust. In a wonderful way we cannot explain, this human spirit blends and unites with Adam's physical body and he becomes (as the KJV and some other versions translate) *"a living soul"*.

Spirit, soul and body

How do spirit, soul and body interrelate? Picture an old-style electric light bulb (the type with a tungsten filament). When you switch on the light, electricity flows through the filament and causes it to glow. The filament represents the physical body; the invisible electricity represents the human spirit; the light represents the soul.

When electricity passes through the filament, it (so to speak) expresses itself as light. This illustrates how God created Adam. When He breathed a human spirit into Adam's body, Adam's spirit began to express itself through his body as *soul*. In other words, Adam became *"a living soul"*. In simple terms, then, my soul is my spirit expressed through the medium of my body.



A highly magnified photograph of the filament of a 200-watt incandescent light bulb – illustrating the inter-relationship of spirit, soul and body as explained above.

Neither my body or my spirit, *on its own*, is 'me'. I exist as the *union* of my physical body and my spirit – in other words, my *embodied spirit*, the *composite of my body and my spirit*. My soul is *my whole person*. My soul is 'me', my 'self', all that I am as a living individual personality.

So we can say that I *have* a body, and I *have* a spirit, but I *am* a soul. In fact, the Hebrew term for 'soul' (*nephesh*)

can in some contexts be translated 'person', 'self', or simply the personal pronoun.

The body

From what we've said above, it's clear that my body is as essential to me as my spirit. We cannot be human without them. This is highly significant. It has important implications for how we think about our bodies.



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The body, as Stuart Babbage explains, "is to be held in honour, treated with respect, and disciplined for the service of God". Paul wrote: *"Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. . . . I discipline my body and keep it under control, . . ."* (1 Corinthians 9:25,27)

1 We must look after our bodies

God created our bodies. Moreover, if we're His children, our bodies are His temple (1 Corinthians 6.19). So we're to use our bodies to serve and glorify Him. Paul urges us, *"I appeal to you . . . to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."* (Romans 12.1).

We're not to abuse our bodies by indulgent gratification or by outright immorality (see 1 Corinthians 6.18). Neither are we to mistreat them by ascetic denial. In Stuart Babbage's words, the body *"is to be held in honour, treated with respect, and disciplined for the service of God"*.

2 We will be resurrected bodily

Bodily existence isn't an imperfect state from which we seek deliverance at death. On the contrary, our weak and ageing bodies will be transformed into bodies resplendent in glory (see 1 Corinthians 15.35-55, and see also 2 Corinthians 5.1-4).

In the life to come, we won't be disembodied spirits floating about in an immaterial, ethereal heaven. We shall have physical bodies. They will be endowed with new and amazing properties unknown to us now, but they will be at least as substantial, solid and real as those we possess now. We couldn't be human without them.

Personality



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Let's go back to our illustration of the light bulb. When you switch on the light, something happens - light streams out and illuminates the space around it. When God breathed a human spirit into Adam's body, something happened. He became a soul - a living person with a personality. That personality had the power to impact the world around him, just as the light from the bulb impacts the room around it. Never underestimate the power of human personality. Some people have amazing ability to influence people.

What is personality? One definition is: *"the characteristic patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that make a person unique"*. Personality involves our *minds* - thinking, perceiving, understanding; our *hearts* - the seat of our desires and motives, and of our emotions; and our *wills* - by which we make our choices and decisions.

And mind, heart and will are intimately linked. The writer to the Hebrews seems to link all three faculties when he speaks about *"the thoughts and intentions of the heart"* (Hebrews 4.12). We really are very complex beings! No wonder the psalmist exclaims: *"I will praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."* (Psalm 139.14). We are such intricate and mysterious beings that we really must place our lives in God's hands. Only He really knows the thoughts and motives of our innermost beings.

Our minds

Our minds are like doorways into our souls. What we allow into our minds influences what we set our hearts on and choose to do. That's why it's so important to feed our minds with wholesome things. Above all, we must study God's word and fill our minds with His truth. Paul prayed for the Colossians *"that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and*

understanding" (Colossians 1.9, and see Ephesians 1.18-19, Colossians 2.2).

Conscience

Conscience is a kind of inner knowledge imprinted on the mind. Rather like an umpire, it makes us aware of whether our actions are good or evil. However, it can be damaged, and may need educating. Some people have very sensitive consciences (see 1 Corinthians 8.7). Others have dulled and defiled their consciences (see 1 Timothy 4.2 and Titus 1.15). As Christians, the Holy Spirit works on our consciences, training them to discern God's will accurately.



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We are *"fearfully and wonderfully made."* (Psalm 139.14).

Our hearts

We typically think of the heart as the seat of our emotions. But the heart is more than that. In Oswald Chambers' words: *"The heart is not merely the seat of the affections The heart is . . . the centre of living, the true centre of all vital activities of body and soul and spirit."* The heart is our innermost control centre. Proverbs 4.23 tells us *"Keep your heart with all*

vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life". Our thoughts and motives flow from our hearts like a fountain to shape our lives and settle our destinies.

If we are children of God, the Holy Spirit has given each of us a new heart (see Ezekiel 36.26). When we are born again, God radically changes our heart. He renews the centre of our beings. Our hearts are no longer sources of evil thoughts and deeds (see Matthew 15.19); they become fountains of purity and love.



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According to one estimate, over a 100 billion people have ever lived on Earth (including those alive today). Yet every person is unique. No one else is exactly like you and me!

Our wills – and God's sovereignty

Each of us, too, has a will – the ability to make choices and decisions. And that raises an important question. God is sovereign over His creation – and therefore over us, too. So are we really free to choose what we say and do? In other words, do we really have free will? And if so, how can we reconcile our free will with God's sovereignty?

The following illustration may help. We humans have 'binocular' vision. This means that each of our eyes sees a slightly different view. But the two images don't conflict. On the contrary, our brain integrates them to give depth and perspective to our vision. It's much harder to judge distances with only one eye.

And that illustrates how we're to deal with this seeming paradox. God is sovereign. And we really do have free will. Both are true. We have to allow God's Spirit to integrate these two truths – God's sovereignty and our responsibility – in our minds to give us true spiritual 'perspective'. We really do have free will. Yet in some mysterious way our freedom of choice is contained and constrained within God's perfect sovereignty.

We have free will – and that includes the freedom to reject and rebel against the One who made us. The first human pair did rebel, and human rebellion continues to this day. So why did God take the risk of giving us free will?

1 Because He made us able to love

As we said earlier in this study, at the very heart of our beings is the capacity to *love* – to love God and to love

each other. But to love requires free will. We have to *choose* to love – otherwise our love is a mere programmed, automatic reaction. And that isn't love at all. And so there must be a possibility of us choosing *not* to love.

2 To give us the dignity of true moral worth

We aren't merely machines, doing whatever we have been programmed to do. Machines don't have free will; they have no responsibility for their actions. But we do have free will. And so we do have responsibility for our actions. That responsibility gives us the dignity of true moral value.

As a race, God gave mankind responsibility to govern Earth and bring God's richest blessing to every part. For the Church, that responsibility now includes fulfilling Jesus's great commission – to "*make disciples of all nations*" (Matthew 28.19). Individually, we're responsible to place our lives in His hands, obey Him and live by His grace. We must be diligent to make our calling and election sure (2 Peter 1.10).

The dynamic of life

We are dynamic beings. We never stop developing and maturing. Each day we live has an impact – however small that may appear to be – on what we will become in later years and, in the end, what we shall be in eternity. There's a well-known saying, "*We sow a thought and reap an act; we sow an act and reap a habit; we sow a habit and reap a character; we sow a character and reap a destiny.*"



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A girl with her grandmother – at the morning and evening of their respective lives. We never stop developing and maturing. Each day we live has an impact – however small that may appear to be – on what we will become in later years and, in the end, what we shall be in eternity.

We reap what we sow (Galatians 6.7-9). So we must sow well. We must take care to form godly habits of both mind and body.

As God's children, we build on the foundation of Jesus Christ. Each day we build something on that foundation. One day what we have built will be tested and revealed for what it really is (compare 1 Corinthians 3.11-15).

What makes us tick?

Beyond our basic instincts - self-preservation, food and drink, procreation - what drives us?

1 An eternal destiny

Os Guinness comments: "Traditionally human life was lived in a house with windows to other worlds, however dirty, broken, or boarded up." They lived in the recognition that there was an unseen spiritual realm. Dr. Guinness continues: "Modern life, however, is lived in what Peter Bergen aptly calls 'a world without windows.'"

Western society lives, to a large extent, in a world from which the supernatural and the eternal is excluded. Our human nature rebels against this. C.S. Lewis remarked: "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." God has put eternity in our hearts (see Ecclesiastes 3.11).



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God designed us to live with a 'window to another world' – in the knowledge that there is an unseen spiritual realm.

2 A desire for God

In his book 'The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment', Jeremiah Burroughs says "nothing but God can fill a soul that is capable of God". In Saint Augustine's words,



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We all have an innate desire to worship God.

"Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it rest in Thee." We are naturally drawn to worship God and find our life in Him. Without Him, people look for a 'replacement god' to fill the aching void – a false religion or philosophy, perhaps, a 'celebrity' or a cause to fight for, or material possessions.

We can go further. The deepest yearning of the human race is not only to know God, but to know Him as *Father*. At the Last Supper, Philip said to Jesus: "*Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us*" (John 14.8). We could paraphrase Philip's request: "*Lord, show us the Father, that's all we need. That will satisfy us.*" Jesus came to show us what the Father is like (see John 14.9). And He came to bring us to Him – as He said, "*No one comes to the Father except through me*".

3 A need to belong

As we noted earlier, mankind is a family. We instinctively long to be part of a group. We feel the need to belong. We crave fellowship, friendship, love. We dread exclusion and loneliness. The sense of being unwanted crushes us.

And alongside this need to belong, we look for respect from others. We need to know we have a place of value and honour in the eyes of others, however helpless or lowly we may be.

4 A desire to have a home

Just as we need a place in society, we need a place we can call home, secure and familiar. We long for a welcoming fireside.

5 An urge to rule

God gave mankind the mandate to rule this Earth (Genesis 1.26,28, Psalm 8.6). God made us to be His royal family! As God wanted us to care for this planet, make it a beautiful and productive paradise, and build a

rich and godly civilisation here.

Sin, of course, has warped that God-given instinct to rule. It descends so often into ruthless oppression of man and beast, and wasteful looting of Earth's resources. But the basic urge to rule is good. God built it into us for His purposes.

And ruling requires work. Before the Fall, work was pleasurable and satisfying in every way. Now it is often not - but we are still called to work. Tim Keller writes: "The fact that God put work in paradise is startling to us, because we almost always think of work as drudgery or even a punishment. First, this shows us that work is as much a basic good need as food, beauty, rest, friendship, prayer, and sexuality. Work is not simply a 'drain' but an important means of fulfilling our deepest needs and thus an important component of the 'good life'."

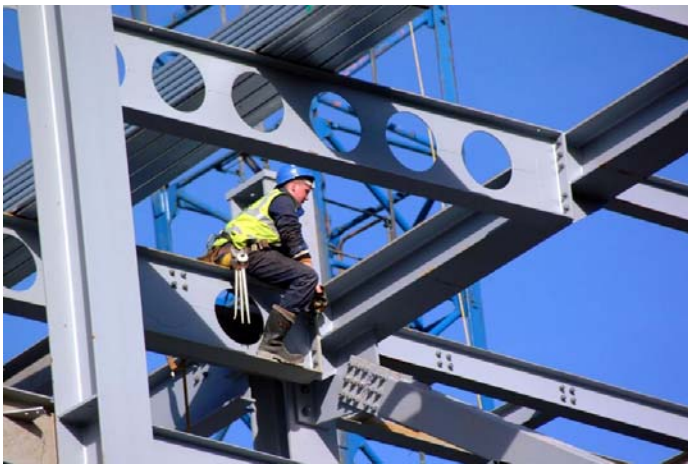


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All work of whatever kind, if it can be done in fellowship with God, is sacred and pleasing to Him. Jesus Himself was a carpenter (the Greek word can also mean 'builder') for most of his adult life.

In fact, God Himself is a worker. He puts in a full working week and then "*on the seventh day*" God "*finished his work that he had done*". (Genesis 2.2). As Tim Keller says, "work has dignity because it is something that God does".

And all kinds of work have dignity – work that requires the use of our hands, as well as intellectual work. Remember that God "*formed the man of dust from the ground*", "*planted a garden*", and formed beasts and birds "*out of the ground*" (Genesis 2. 7,8,19). God did manual work!

Jesus Himself was a carpenter (the Greek word can also mean 'builder') for most of his adult life. Phillip Jensen and Tony Payne write: "If God came into the world, what would he be like? For the ancient Greeks, he might have been a philosopher-king. The ancient Romans might have looked for a just and noble statesman. But how does the God of the Hebrews come into the world? As a carpenter — a worker."

All work of whatever kind, if done in obedience to God, is sacred and pleasing to Him. It's said that Billy Graham's wife Ruth had a plaque above the kitchen sink at their home which read: '*Divine service done here daily*'.

And work – the sort of work God made us for – puts our natural creativity to use. God intends us to use every gift of mind and body to fulfil our creational mandate. We make things that are not merely functional, but also beautiful, stylish, elegant. We aspire to bring beauty and order to the world around us. We are explorers - we set off to discover new worlds, new truths, new ideas, the secret formula; we thirst for knowledge from our earliest childhood. All these are natural outworkings of our mandate to subdue the earth, rule it and make it a paradise.

6 A need for significance

We need to know our lives count for something, that there's a reason for our existence, that we have a purpose in life. A sumptuous cruise on a luxury liner would begin as a delight. But over time it would become a nightmare of aimlessness. God didn't make us to spend endless days in empty amusement. He made us for a mission.

Why are we here?

And what is our mission? Last session, we saw that God gave mankind a task. Adam and Eve were to look after and guard the garden. They and their offspring were to subdue the Earth and have dominion over every living thing. To do all this, Adam and Eve functioned in three ways – as **priests**, as **kings** and as **prophets**.

You'll encounter priests, kings and prophets right through much of the Bible. For example, priests served God in the Temple. A succession of kings ruled Israel from David onwards. And there were prophets who spoke God's messages to people – such as Samuel and Isaiah.

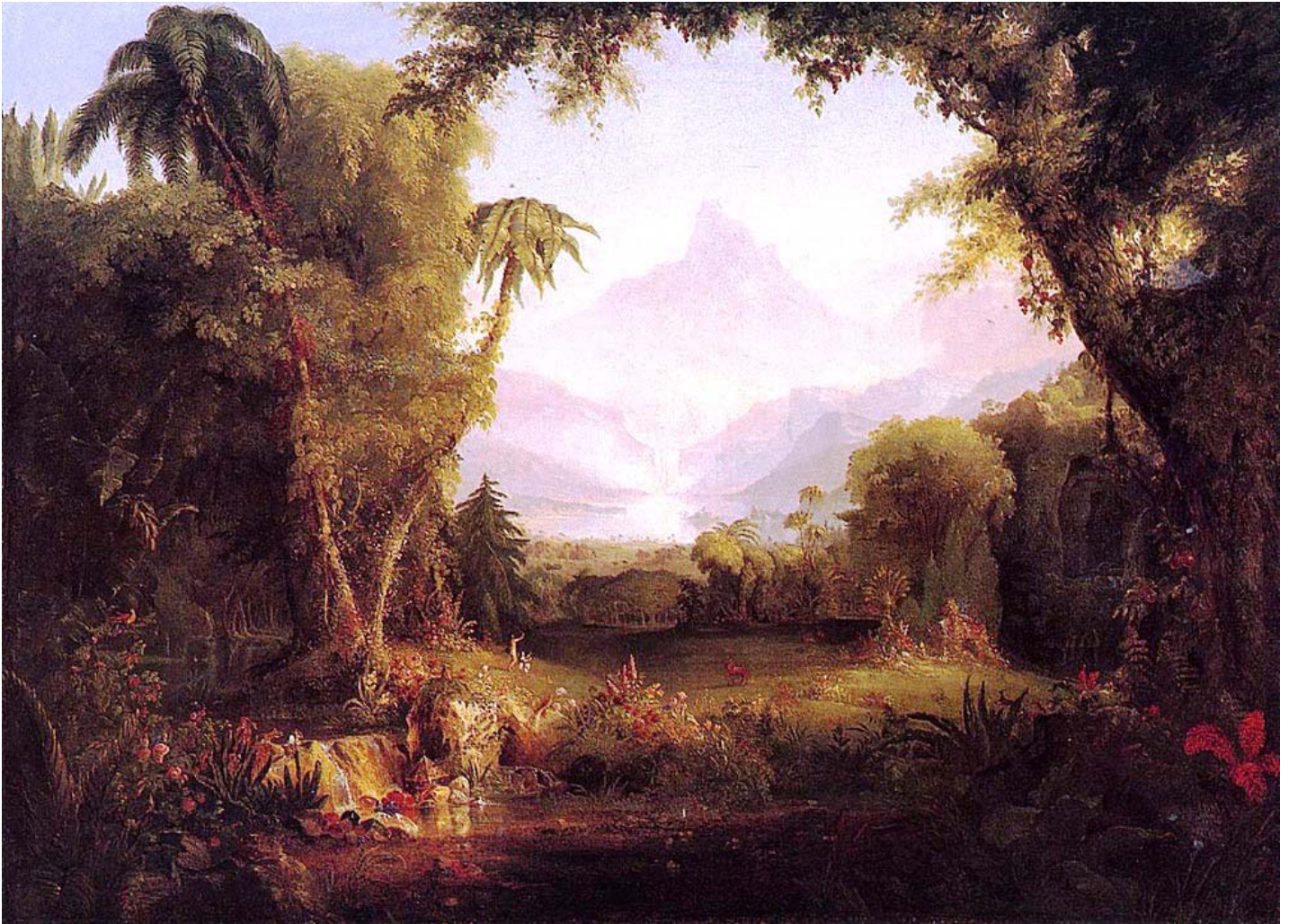
To be a priest or king or prophet was a special privilege. Only certain people could be priests, for example. And, in general, it wasn't possible for people to function in more than one role – for example, kings couldn't also be

priests. But now God wants every one of His people to be a priest and a king and a prophet! Those Old Testament priests, kings and prophets are pictures. They're pictures of what God intends all His people to be.

A priestly role

God commanded Adam to "*to work... and keep*" (ESV) or "*to work... and take care of*" (NIV) the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2.15). As we saw in the last session, these two verbs suggest a link between the ministry in the Tabernacle and the Temple, and mankind's work in the garden.

There's another link between the Tabernacle and the garden. In Genesis 3.8 we read that Adam and Eve heard God "*walking in the garden*". The Hebrew word



'The Garden of Eden' painted by Thomas Cole (1801-1848) and held by the Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas. Mankind's task was to look after and guard the garden. But the garden was only, so to speak, 'a building site'. God called us to complete His 'world project'. Through science, technology and the arts, God wanted our race to build a cultured, godly civilisation here on Earth - a paradise where He would live with us.

translated "*walking*" here is also used to describe God's presence among His people in the Tabernacle (Leviticus 26.12, Deuteronomy 23.14, 2 Samuel 7.6-7).

The Tabernacle and the Temple that superseded it were God's earthly home. So was the garden, thousands of years before. Just as the priests and Levites cared for the Tabernacle and Temple and served Him there, so Adam and Eve were to care for God's garden home in Eden, and serve Him there. They had to keep it holy and protect it from evil, so He and they could continue to live there together. That was a *priestly* role.

As Adam and Eve's family grew ever larger, God intended them to expand the Garden, too. One day, it would cover the whole Earth. The whole planet was to become God's home, where He and mankind enjoyed fellowship together. Every member of Adam and Eve's family would have a part to play in looking after the Garden and keeping it holy. In other words, *everyone* would function as a priest.

A kingly role

God appointed mankind to subdue the Earth and have dominion over every living thing in it (Genesis 1.26,28). That is a *kingly* function.

As we saw in the last session, God called us to complete

His 'world project'. We were to be *culture-builders*. Through science, technology and the arts, God wanted our race to build a cultured, godly civilisation here on Earth. We were to make this planet a paradise – a paradise where God lived with us in perfect harmony.

How was mankind to do this? Not by toil and sweat. That was the result of the Fall. God never meant paradise to be won through wearisome toil. So how was it to be done?

Before the Fall, Adam and Eve were doubtless endowed with tremendous abilities far greater than we possess now. All would have been employed in the task God had given them.



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A scene from the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. Bruce Waltke wrote: "C. S. Lewis remarked at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth in 1953 that 'the pressing of that huge, heavy crown on that small, young head was a symbol of the situation of all men.' God has called humanity to be his vice-regents and high priests on earth."

But probably the most important was the power of speech. We're in God's image. Like Him, we speak. God's word has limitless power; He created everything by His word. It's reasonable to suggest that, in our unfallen state, our spoken words would have had great power, too – far beyond what we possess today. We would have enjoyed amazing ability to communicate our ideas and insights to each other. And our words would have carried great authority as we ruled the natural world.

A prophetic role

Finally, Adam and his family had a *prophetic* role. What do prophets do? Moses and Isaiah and Ezekiel and the other prophets of the Bible brought God's instructions and counsel and comfort to His people.

But prophets are more than just God's messengers. Abraham Heschel explains that the prophet *"claims to be far more than a messenger. He is a person who stands in the presence of God (Jeremiah 15:19), who stands 'in the council of the Lord' (Jeremiah 23:18) . . ."* Amos says: *"For the Lord GOD does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets."* (Amos 3.7).

Prophets are people who live in God's presence. God shares His secrets with them. As God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden, He doubtless shared His secrets with them and told them about His wonderful plans for creation. And so Adam and Eve were functioning as *prophets*.

And Adam may also have been exercising a prophetic role when he named the animals (Genesis 2.19-20). God

brought *"every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens"* to Adam *"to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name."* Adam was certainly doing more than simply giving them convenient labels. It seems likely that Adam, with God-given insight, gave each kind of animal a name that encapsulated its unique nature and special role in the natural world.

And naming the animals was also a kingly role. Victor Hamilton observes *"to confer a name . . . is to speak from a position of authority and sovereignty"*.

Naming the animals: preparing Adam for Eve

There may well be another reason that God brought the animals and birds to Adam to name. Naming them involved understanding their natures and special roles in the natural world. And that, in turn, will have awakened him to his own nature and needs. He found that none of these creatures could satisfy his need for companionship. But when God brings the woman, Adam exclaims *"at last!"*.

That suggests that the process of naming the animals prepared him for the woman. It created in him a hunger for her.

And when God brought the woman to Adam, he named her, saying *". . . she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man"*. As we've just said, to confer a name is to exercise authority. This suggests that Adam is exercising leadership in their marital relationship.



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The night skyline of Sydney, Australia – with its iconic opera house, the Sydney Harbour Bridge behind and the city beyond. In a land discovered by the Western world only a few centuries ago, art, technology and commerce flourish in a vibrant city – testament to our God-given urge to be culture builders.

Angels – God's secret agents

God created another kind of personal being, besides mankind. These are the angels. Who are they, and what do they do?

The most common names for angel are *mal'āk* in the Old Testament and *angelos* in the New Testament. Both names basically mean 'messenger'. In fact, both names

can be applied to human messengers (for example, Haggai 1.13, Luke 7.24).

The Bible occasionally refers to angelic beings by other names too, and this reveals more about them. For example, they're called *"heavenly beings"*, or in the margin *"sons of God"*, or *"sons of might"* (Psalms 29.1

ESV). They're also called "*servants*" (Psalm 103.21 NIV, and see Hebrews 1.14). We know two angels by name, Gabriel and Michael.

There seem to be various ranks of angel. The New Testament refers to "*thrones*", "*dominions*", "*rulers*", "*authorities*", and "*powers*" (see Colossians 1.16 and 1 Peter 3.22). These may well be different orders of angelic being. Satan himself is a powerful angel - perhaps the chief of all angels. Many other angels sinned, too - see 2 Peter 2.4 and Jude 6. We'll consider Satan and his evil angels in more detail in our next session.

Where do angels live?

Angels live in the invisible heavenly places (see, for example, Matthew 18.10). Genesis 1.1 suggests that the heavenly places were created before the six days of creation. It seems that angels, too, existed before the six creation days. Job 38.7 tells us that "*the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy*" when God created the Earth. These 'morning stars' and 'sons of God' seem to be angels.

Although angels serve God here on Earth, they aren't at home here. Earth is *mankind's* home (see Psalm 115.16).

The Angel of the Lord

There is another special angel mentioned in the Old Testament. He's called 'the Angel of the Lord' or 'the Angel of God' (for example Genesis 22.10-12, 31.11-13, Exodus 3.1-6, Judges 2.1-4, Judges 13.2-22). In many passages, this Angel is identified with God (for example Exodus 3.1-6). But in other instances, the Angel seems to be distinct from God (see, for example, Genesis 22.10-12). Jesus Christ, too, was both God Himself and sent from God. The Angel of the Lord seems to be Jesus appearing in temporary visible form before His incarnation.

What are angels like?

Angels are spirits. They don't have physical bodies like ours. However, they do sometimes appear visibly in human form (see Daniel 8.15, Mark 16.5). In fact, some people have entertained angels without even knowing it (Hebrews 13.2). But it's important to remember we must never try to contact angels.

Angels have personalities, like we do. They think and understand and have desires (see 1 Peter 1.12). They possess wills and so are morally accountable to God. There was a time when many used that freedom to disobey God, as 2 Peter 2.4 and Jude 6 indicate.

Angels "*neither marry nor are given in marriage*" (Matthew 22.30). God seems to have created each angel separately. In contrast, God created mankind as a family. Angels aren't related to each other like we are. It seems certain they don't experience friendship and love in the way we do.

Neither do angels relate to God as we do. Through Jesus Christ's work on the Cross, God's people are as closely related to Him as any created being can be. God's people are married to the Lamb - angels are not. Christians call God Father, angels do not. God indwells His people, but He doesn't indwell angels.



Abraham and the Three Angels' painted by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617-1682) and held by the National Gallery of Canada. Notice how the artist portrays the angels as ordinary men.

We as humans are made to love - to love God and to love each other. Love lies at the very heart of what it is to be human. In contrast, it seems that angels were primarily created to serve God. The very name 'angel' itself indicates this. As we've already mentioned, the main Hebrew and Greek words for 'angel' both mean 'messenger'.

Of course, God's people serve Him too - we are fellow-servants with angels (see Revelation 19.10, Revelation 22.9). But angels minister to God only as *servants*. In contrast, God's people minister to Him as *members of His family* - as His beloved children, as Jesus's beloved Bride.

So we, as God's people, enjoy a closer relationship with Him than the angels do. And we have a more exalted and wonderful vocation. Remember that it's a Member of the human race - not an angel - Who now rules over all creation. And one day we, His people, will share His dominion (see Revelation 5.9-10, 22.5 and compare Revelation 3.21). As the writer to the Hebrews tells us, "*it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come*" (Hebrews 2.5). It is to mankind.

What do angels do?

Angels worship God (Hebrews 1.6) and praise Him (see Psalm 148.2, Luke 2.13-14, Revelation 5.11-12). Through the Bible we read of angels giving people messages from God - for example, to Daniel (Daniel 8.15-26, 9.20-27), Zechariah (Luke 1.11-20), Mary (Luke 1.26-38), Joseph (Matthew 1.20-23) and the shepherds (Luke 2.8-14). Angels serve God in other ways, too. For example, God may send them to administer His judgments; an angel afflicted Herod with a mortal disease (Acts 12.23). Angels

were involved in God's giving of the Law of Moses (Acts 7.53, Galatians 3.19, Hebrews 2.2).

And God's angels help people – for example an angel released the apostles (Acts 5.19) and, later, Peter from prison (Acts 12.7-11). The Lord gives angelic protection to those who trust Him (see Psalm 91.11-12). Angels ministered to Jesus Himself whilst He was on Earth (Matthew 4.11, Luke 22.43). And they minister for the benefit of God's children, too (Hebrews 1.14).



Detail from a painting by William Brassey Hole (1846 – 1917). It depicts the appearance of two angels to the women in the empty tomb: "... behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel." (Luke 24.4).

A spectacle to angels

Angels take an intense interest in how God is unfolding His plan of salvation on Earth. Why are they so attentive to what's happening here?

Doubtless it's because sin first broke out in the angelic realm. Satan, God's arch-enemy, is an angel. He was apparently an angel of great authority before he fell. With Satan are a whole host of evil angels (see Matthew 25.41 and Revelation 12.9).

Satan gained power over mankind *here on Earth* when Adam and Eve succumbed to his temptation. Appropriately, God's final battle with Satan was fought and won *here on Earth*, through Christ on the Cross. It's *here on Earth* that Satan and his spiritual forces of evil continue their fierce rearguard action against God and His Church.

Angels may not be at home here on Earth, but they're certainly involved in the spiritual battle that rages here. No wonder they're so eager to know more about how God's is working out His redemptive plan for this world. In fact, Ephesians 3.10 tells us that God is now revealing His wonderfully rich and multifaceted wisdom to "*rulers and authorities in the heavenly places*" And He's doing this "*through the church*" – *through us, His people!*

The evil beings in heavenly places are watching what's going on here. They're seeing God's marvellous plan being outworked – to create a new humanity released from Satan's dominion and who will participate in Jesus Christ's dominion! And they are powerless to prevent it. Andrew Lincoln tells us (in his explanation of Ephesians 3.9-10) that "*the Church provides hostile cosmic powers with a tangible reminder that their authority has been decisively broken and that all things are subject to Christ*".

God's holy angels are watching what's going on, too. Peter tells us that angels long to know more as they see God's plan of salvation being unfolded (1 Peter 1.12). Martyn Lloyd-Jones comments (on Ephesians 3.10): "*what is happening in the Church is so stupendous, so glorious, that even the bright angelic beings who have spent their entire existence in the presence of God, even they are staggered and amazed at what they see in and through the Church. ... what takes place in the Church is something that even they had never thought of or imagined. It surpasses even their knowledge, their comprehension, and even their imagination.*"

► Next Session The Fall

Adam and Eve's relationship with God in paradise didn't last. In the next step of our journey we'll see what happened there in the paradise garden. And we'll see how God responded and set in motion His plan of salvation.

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