

# THE BIG JOURNEY

## from Creation to New Creation



### three ► In God's Image

#### Introduction and Questions

Oswald Chambers wrote 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*” our race “*with glory and honour*” (Psalm 8.5).

And the most astonishing thing about us is this: God made us “*in his own image*” (Genesis 1.27). What does it mean to be in God's image? We aren't actually divine, of course. But we're as *like* God as it is possible for any created being to be. We humans are a true expression of God's nature and character in time-bound, creaturely form.

Ever since Adam and Eve's fall, of course, sin has damaged and scarred us. But even now, in their essential nature, people still bear God's image (see Genesis 9.6, James 3.9).

#### Jesus - God made Man

We are made in God's image. 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 Philippians 2.7). But He didn't *humiliate* Himself.

#### Precious to God

We are made in God's image. And so we possess the value that His image confers. We're very precious to God. 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 as God's image-bearers has profound implications for how we live. We treat our most precious objects with great care. So we're to treat

ourselves with great care, too. We're to take care about what we do with our bodies, what we fill our minds with, how we use our gifts and how we spend our time.

And our value as God's image-bearers has profound implication, too, for how we treat others. If I'm so valuable, then so is my friend and my neighbour - and so is my enemy. That truth must govern how we relate to them.

### A living soul

In Genesis 2.7 we read how God created the first man, Adam. He formed a human body from the dust of the ground. Then He breathed into this body "*the breath of life*" - that is, a human spirit. In a wonderful way we cannot explain, this human spirit blended and united with Adam's body and he became "*a living creature*" or (as some versions translate) "*a living soul*". He became a living person with a *personality* - which we can define as: "*the characteristic patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that make a person unique*".

### Made for relationship

As humans, what 'makes us tick'? God has built into our human nature certain basic aspirations - there'll be opportunity to explore these in our group discussion. But a key one is the need for *relationship*. We're created for:

- **Relationship with God.** God made us for fellowship with Himself. And He made us in such a way that He could make His home in us by the Spirit.
- **Relationship with each other.** God created only Adam directly (Genesis 2.7). He made Eve from Adam's body (Genesis 2.21-23). And every other human is a descendant of Adam and Eve. Jesus, too, was a member of the human race, related to Adam through His mother Mary (though not His foster-father Joseph). 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.*" Friendship and love are basic to what it means to be human. We instinctively need to feel part of a community. We fear exclusion, isolation and loneliness.



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### The Church – God's new humanity

So when the New Testament speaks about the church as a family, and as a body with many members, this isn't a completely new idea. God built it into human nature right from the very beginning.

## Man and woman



*La Recolte des Foins (The Harvesting of the Hay)* by Julien Dupré (1851-1910)

'La Recolte des Foins' ('The Harvesting of the Hay') by the French painter Julien Dupré (1851-1910).

The artist depicts men and women harvesting hay together. The couple in the foreground may be husband and wife, brother and sister, some more distant relationship or simply fellow workers. The inter-dependence of the sexes goes beyond marriage to embrace all types of male-female relationships.

In Genesis 2.18 we read: *"Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone' . . . ."* So God created Eve to be his companion, *"a helper comparable to him"* (Genesis 2.18 NKJV).

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 bodily *union*, and a soul *communion*. Woman perfectly complements the man and vice versa. She completes him, and he in turn completes her.

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. *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"*.

## What were we made to do?

And what is that mandate? In the last session, we saw that God gave mankind a task. Adam and Eve were to look after and guard the Garden of Eden. And



*Sydney Opera house HDR Sydney Australia* © Linh\_rOm / Hai Linh Truong : Flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)

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.

they were to extend the Garden's boundaries across the globe until the whole Earth was a paradise. God wanted man and woman together to be fruitful, subdue the Earth and have dominion over every living creature (Genesis 1.28). In a word, they were to be *culture builders*, working to complete God's work of forming and filling the Earth. In the group discussion, we'll explore a little more deeply at what God put us in this world to do.

## Angels

God created another kind of personal being besides humans – the angels. The most common Bible name for angel basically means 'messenger'. Other names include "*heavenly beings*" (or "*sons of God*", "*sons of might*") and "*servants*".

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). Like us humans, angels have personalities. Like us, they have minds and emotions and wills. The holy angels worship God and serve Him in a variety of ways. Although angels serve God here on Earth as well as in the heavenly realms that are invisible to us, they're at home in the heavenly places.

As well as holy angels, who serve God, there are evil angels. Chief among these wicked angels is Satan, God's arch-enemy. We'll consider Satan and his evil angels in the next session.

But angels don't 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. Angels minister to God as *servants*. In contrast, God's people minister to Him as *members of His family* - His precious children, Jesus's beloved Bride.

So Christians enjoy a closer relationship with Him than angels do. And we have a more exalted and wonderful vocation. A human being – a Member of our human race - now rules creation, not an angel. That Human is Jesus Christ. One day we, His people, will share His dominion (see Revelation 5.9-10, 22.5).

## 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). The Angel of the Lord seems to be Jesus appearing in temporary visible form before His incarnation.

## Reading and reflecting

Read Genesis 2.7-25 again, and also read Genesis 9.6, Psalm 8.1-9, Psalm 139.1-18, 1 Corinthians 11.7-12, Ephesians 5.22-33, James 3.7-10.

- ? In what ways are we in God's image?
- ? How does being in God's image affect the way we live?
- ? What is the significance of Adam and Eve being "*naked . . . and not ashamed*"?
- ? In what way is the woman a "*helper*" to the man?
- ? What was mankind's 'job description'?
- ? What do people really need to experience true satisfaction and fulfilment in their lives?