

“WHO AM I?” (Genesis 1:26-28)

Our family has always enjoyed the Jason Bourne movies, in which the main character – Matt Damon – suffers amnesia, and spends three movies trying to figure out who he is. What he doesn't know is that he is a highly-trained CIA agent, and in one scene, he's sitting in a restaurant and finds himself memorizing every license plate in the parking lot, and closely observing the details of every person sitting in the restaurant. He says, “Who does this kind of thing?” When he's attacked by bad guys, he discovers he's a highly trained fighter. He also discovers that he is fluent in several languages. But he doesn't know who he is.

One of the fundamental questions of life is: Who am I? It's an important question because knowing our identity answers a second fundamental question: Why am I here? Most of the problems we have in the world today are the result of forgetting who we are as human beings. We are conditioned to believe that our identity is wrapped up in what we look like, how much money we have, how many followers we have on social media, or how good our family looks. More and more our identity is based on what political group we belong to, what race we are, what gender we are, or what gender we want to be. We seem to have a collective amnesia as to our original identity and purpose.

The Bible has a refreshingly simple answer to these questions, and it's found in the sixth day of creation at the end of Genesis chapter 1. After recounting first 6 ½ days of creation, verses 26-28 tells us about the crowning jewel of God's creation – you and me – and who we are. These are verses that our world desperately needs to hear, because once we understand who we are, we can live and function according to who we were made to be.

In Genesis 1:26-28 we read, Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

These verses tell us three fundamental truths about who we are. Number one, and most foundational, **WE ARE CREATED BY GOD**. God says, “Let us make mankind.” The word “make” is the Hebrew word *bara*, which means to make out of nothing. Just as God created the heavens and the earth and all the animals, so we take our place in creation as created beings – but there's something special about our creation. 2:7 adds to our understanding where it says, “Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”

Note that mankind does not slowly evolve over millions of years – God creates Adam instantaneously – a full, functioning human being. With the rest of creation God simply spoke things into existence, but God does things differently with man. He uses a combination of natural means – the dust of the earth – and supernatural means by breathing into man the breath of life. The dust reminds us we are earthly beings, that we are fragile, that we are not self-existent, but completely dependent on God. Yet there is something special about us that sets us apart from all other creation, which we'll look at that in a moment.

The first step in knowing our identity is to recognize that God is the creator and we are His creation. Life is not about us – it's about God. We are important – we as the masterpiece of His creation – but God is God, and we are not. Life takes on meaning and significance when we focus our time, energy, and affection on our creator and seek to fulfill His purposes for our lives.

You may have noticed verse 26 says, “Let us make mankind.” “Us”... Who is the “us”? This is the Bible’s first hint of the trinity – that God, who is one, exists in three persons. Let me try to explain the trinity to you in thirty seconds, and clear up any confusion 😊. The Bible emphasizes that there is one God, but that God is made up of three persons – meaning that God is personal – God isn’t a force – He is relational and personal.

God is one in His essence or nature, but exists in three persons. This means that Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God – coequal and coeternal. But the Father is not Jesus, and Jesus is not the Holy Spirit. There are not three gods – there is one God in three persons – and each person is fully God. If you don’t understand all this, then I have done a good job explaining it, because the triune nature of God is something we will never fully understand this side of heaven – and God doesn’t expect us to understand, but to believe it and marvel at it.

The second truth we find about ourselves in these verses is that **WE ARE CREATED IN GOD’S IMAGE**. This is huge, and once we grasp it, the entire focus of our life comes into view. In the Latin this is known the *imago deo*. What does it mean to be made in God’s image? It means that God gave something of Himself to us – something He did not give to the rest of creation. We bear a resemblance to God, and we were made to represent God. We are not merely physical beings – there is a transcendence to us. We have a soul – we have a part of us that’s immaterial.

Technically speaking, animals have souls in the sense that they are living beings, just as we are. Some of you view your dog as member of the family and include them in the family photos. Your pet moves and communicates – at least through barking – they show emotion by wagging their tail when you come home and playing fetch with you. They are different from plants and trees in that they have a living soul, but they are not made in the image of God, and they do not have a spirit that relates to God as we do. Psalm 42:1 says, “As the deer pants for the streams of water, so my soul pants after God.” An animal pants after water, but they don’t pant after God.

We are different than the rest of creation in that we resemble God. We are not little gods – we are not all-powerful and all-knowing – we are not God – but we share with Him many of His attributes. Whether people realize it or not, we bear His image in four ways... Mentally, we are created with the ability to choose and reason – which is a reflection of God’s intellect and freedom. Anytime someone invents a machine, writes a book, paints a landscape, enjoys a symphony, calculates a sum, or names a pet, they proclaim the fact that they are made in God’s image.

Morally, we are created in righteousness and perfect innocence, a reflection of God’s holiness. God saw all He had made and called it “very good” (Genesis 1:31). Unlike the rest of creation, we have a conscience – a sense of right and wrong. We are shocked when evil is done, and demand that there is justice for those who have been wronged. Every civilization throughout history has had moral codes and laws that dictate how people should live. When someone is doing something wrong, we say, “That’s not acceptable – you ought not to do that.” That’s because we bear God’s image. Each time we reach out and help someone in need, when we do and help victims of hurricanes or fires, we reflect the compassion of God. We help because it’s in our nature to do so.

Socially, we are created for fellowship, which is a reflection of the fellowship and love enjoyed by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Their unity serves as a model for the unity we are to have with God and each other. Each time someone prays, reads their Bible, or watches a sunset and worships God, they relate to their creator. Horizontally, each time someone gets married, hugs their kid, makes a friend, or attends church, they relate to their fellow image-bearers and reflect the fellowship and unity the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have with each other.

Physically, although God does not have a body, God creates our bodies as instruments to represent our human nature – a reflection of His qualities of seeing, hearing, and speaking.

One might ask, “If we are made in God’s image, why do so many people – including myself – do such a poor job of reflecting it?” Part of being made in God’s image is that Adam – the first human being – was given the freedom to choose – and he choose to disobey and rebel against his creator, which tainted the image of God, and that damaged image was passed on to all his descendants. Theologians say that the image of God in us has been *defaced*, but not *erased*. We still bear the image of God, but we also bear the scars of sin – mentally, morally, socially, and physically.

The grand story of the Bible is that Jesus came, in the perfect image and likeness of God, to redeem fallen humanity and restore us to the original image of God. Colossians 3:10 talks about putting off the old self... “and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (Colossians 3:10). The best way to reflect the image of God is to become more and more conformed the image of Christ every day – so that we less and less like our fallen sinful self, and more and more like Him. Once we arrive in heaven, we will be perfectly conformed to the image of God.

Being made in God’s image has huge ramifications for how we view ourselves and others. It means that **we should view ourselves as valued and planned by God**. David talks about our immense value in Psalm 139:13-16... “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. 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.” There is nothing more valuable in the cosmos than you and me, and our value does not come from what we look like or what we do, it comes from who we are.

In our fallen state, we are prone to compare ourselves with others – how they look, how many friends they have, how much money they have, how good their marriage is and how their kids turn out – and we’re tempted to base our value on how we stack up. But none of these things have anything to do with our value. Our value is based on being made in God’s image, and a big part of Christian maturity is accepting the way God made us and purposing to declare God’s glory regardless of our flaws, our handicaps, or our life story.

I think of someone like Nick Vujicic, who was born with arms or legs. If anyone had the right to complain about their lot in life it would be him. When he was ten years old, he tried to commit suicide because life was so painful, but over time He became a Christian and discovered God’s purpose for his life, and today travels the world sharing His testimony and inviting people to faith in Christ. One day in heaven all of our flaws and imperfections disappear, but until then we are to glorify God in our weaknesses and accept God’s story for our lives.

Since we are valued by God, **we are to value other image-bearers and treat them with dignity and respect.** This includes people we don't like, or who do us wrong. James 3:9 says, "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness." Whenever we say something unkind or spiteful about someone, we're attacking God. We're attacking someone that He made in His image and is valuable to Him. This means that we should reign in our tongue and think twice about what we say about or to others, or what we post online about someone. Every person is made, as you are, in the image of God.

Valuing other image-bearers also includes **the most vulnerable** – the unborn, the elderly, the disabled, and the poor. There is a sanctity to all human life from womb to tomb. It's clear from Psalm 139 that life begins at conception. God tells Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1:5, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you." God is the one who creates us and knits us together in our mother's womb and knows us as a person before we are even completely formed in the womb and gives us life there.

There is also an amazing verse in Luke 1:41 where Mary, who is pregnant with Jesus in her first trimester, goes to visit her sister Elizabeth, who is pregnant with John the Baptist in her third trimester. When the two expectant mothers greet each other, Elizabeth's baby, John the Baptist, "leaped in her womb." Here is John, in his third trimester, who recognizes Jesus as a person created in God's image in the early stage of His birth process. In God eyes, there is no difference between an unborn baby and a newborn baby. They are both living human beings made in God's image. Knowing that we are made in the image of God should frame how we view abortion, and doctor assisted suicide, and how we treat the weakest among us.

The fact that we are created in God's image also speaks loudly to another huge issue in our day – the issue of **race**. From God's perspective, He does not see race. We're all part of the human race. No matter what skin color we have or culture we come from, we're all made in God's image – and our differences bear no effect on our value or design.

I don't know if you've ever read the full title of Charles Darwin's groundbreaking book published in 1859, but it's titled "On the origin of species by means of natural selection or the preservation of favored races in the struggle for life." It's not only a long title, it's a racist title – and one you won't find in school textbooks. In evolution, and in the liberal secularism of the day – identity is found in your race or your pecking order in society – all of which pits people against each other and leads to never-ending strife and division. But as Christians, who find our identity in Christ, race is not a thing. We are all one in Christ – adopted into the same family. We are not Jew or Gentile, or black or white – we human beings made in the image of God.

As we get back to our original question: Who am I? We've seen that we are created by God, we are made in His image, and now third: **WE ARE CREATED MALE AND FEMALE.** Verse 27 says, "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." From the very beginning, God created us to bear His image through our unique, God-given gender. He created male and female to be equal in value and importance, but different in the way we display God's glory. Equality does not mean sameness. All through Genesis 1 we see God creating counterparts – He makes day and He makes night; He makes the earth and He makes the sky; He makes land, He makes sea; He makes the sun to rule the day and the moon and stars to rule the night. And now in creating human beings in His image, He makes them male and female. The male/female distinction becomes the basis throughout the Bible for our roles in marriage, family, and church.

When I was going to a community college years ago, I had a professor that said there was no difference between men and women – it was just a construct that society made up. Everyone instinctively knows that men and women are different – and sometimes very different – not just biologically, but in their makeup. Every culture throughout history has recognized that there are general masculine traits and general feminine traits. In 1992 a secular author named John Gray popularized some of these differences in a book he entitled “Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus.” Men and women live on different planets in our interests, our needs and desires, how we communicate – and a host of other things.

God made us different genders to reflect His glory, and we should celebrate those differences, not try to deny them or blur them. There is an order to creation – Adam is created first, then Eve. Again, it has nothing to do with importance or superiority, but with different roles and functions. In Genesis 1 & 2 God gives man the role of headship, and women the role of helper. That statement alone could get me banned from Facebook, but God said it, not me.

Before the fall, this was never a problem. Adam and Eve simply accepted their roles and there was perfect harmony. It’s all part of the many distinctions we find in Genesis 1 that God makes to bring order to chaos. But after the fall, there’s trouble. Men do not always lead well or lead at all, and women do not always help and support. But living in an imperfect world is no excuse to abandon our roles, for our roles reflect the image of God.

But our culture today goes far beyond rebelling against gender roles, to deny that there is even such a thing as a birth-assigned gender. Just ten years or so ago, when you filled out a form that asked you to check what gender you are – there were two choices – male and female. Today, depending on what form you fill out, there are dozens of so-called genders you can choose from. Facebook has a whopping 58 genders by which you can identify. We are living in the midst of a cultural revolution that is attempting to redefine what gender and sexuality has meant for all of human history, and right before our eyes it is gaining steam, and there is a tremendous amount of pressure on churches to get with the times and conform.

We’ve forgotten who we are – we are made in the image of God, male and female. It’s not complicated. It’s biblical. It’s biological. It’s common sense. So why is there all this madness to redo God’s design? Again, it’s the fall. Adam’s fall into sin and rebellion has affected every element of life on earth, so that in the darkness of sin, fallen people cannot see the basic truths that are woven into creation.

As a church we dare not go with the flow and give into the gender revolution of the day, but at the same time we must treat every person with dignity, respect, and compassion. We must be mindful that, because of the fall, some struggle with their gender in deep ways. We can and should certainly show compassion for anyone who struggles in a broken world.

The truth is – we’re all broken – my brokenness my look different than your brokenness, but we all struggle with the effects of a fallen world. Jesus spent a great deal of time with broken, hurting, confused people – and treated each one with dignity. At the same time, He never approved or condoned sin. We are called to do the same. We can and should have compassion – but it’s not compassionate to affirm and applaud rebellion against God’s design. It doesn’t help them to live contrary to God’s purpose.

It's not compassionate to tell people to "do what you feel inside," because we're all broken inside, and to define ourselves out of our brokenness is dangerous. Just because we struggle with something does not mean that we should give in to it or be defined by it. Love is helping people become who Christ made them to be, and walking with them in the journey to become like Him. It's a long journey, a hard journey, but we are blessed when we live according to who He created us to be.

In the Jason Bourne movies, Matt Damon slowly recovers his memory over time, and once he does, everything makes sense. Many of the problems our world faces today is the result of us forgetting who we are – and we desperately need to go back to the very beginning of creation and discover our true identity...

- 1) To see that we are created by God. He is the potter, and we are the clay. He's the designer of life, and we are His grand design. Recognizing this should cause us to bow in worship and declare God's sovereignty over our lives. He is the master designer... why would we not follow His design?
- 2) We are made in the image of God. We are the masterpiece of His creation, made to bear His likeness and represent Him. We are valuable to God and are to treat everyone made in God's image with respect and dignity, from womb to tomb.
- 3) And we are created male and female, made to reflect God's glory according to who He uniquely made me to be. We should embrace our gender, celebrate it, and honor God with it.

We've tackled some tough subjects today, but regardless of what the subject is, we must always return to the original order and design of God, for it's in His order and design that we rediscover our identity, and our identity gives order and meaning and purpose to life.