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chapter 1

In His Image

*“God created man in His own image . . . male
and female He created them.”*

∞ GENESIS 1:27

In the past three years, I’ve been blessed in many ways, one of those ways being the gift of our two little grandsons, Wesley and Hayden. During this time, my husband and I have had the opportunity to rediscover the joy of having little ones around. We had no idea how splendid being grandparents would be . . . little toothless smiles, halting steps, ticklish toes, bright eyes.

Our little Hayden (who isn’t yet a year old at this writing) has bonded with my husband, Phil (a.k.a. “Poppie”). Hayden loves him, and whenever Poppie is around, he just naturally gravitates toward him. Phil’s in love, too. “Want me to hold the boy?” he asks. That’s Phil-speak for “Please give me the baby right now, before I grab him.”

Poppie and Hayden frequently take little strolls through our backyard. They look at leaves. They touch the flowers. They watch the birdies in the bird feeders. They are discovering the world: Hayden for the first time, Poppie anew.

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

When you look at the world, what do you see? When the sky blazes in dazzling golden scarlet, when you hear the silence of a snowfall, or dive under a wave as it crashes powerfully over your body, what are you aware of?

When you watch a little toddler try to stack colored rings in the right order or when an ice skater finally lands that quadruple jump and the crowd erupts in cheers, do you know what you are seeing?

Do you see God's hand everywhere? Do you see His fingerprint on this world? Lofty mountains, verdant trees, azure sky, fertile earth . . . the smell of gardenias, the gurgle of a baby's laugh all speak loudly to those who are listening. Do you hear? Do you really see?

*Earth's crammed with heaven
And every common bush afire with God:
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round it, and pluck blackberries,
And daub their natural faces unaware.¹*

Earth is crammed with heaven. Think on those words. In everything you see, do you really see? Are you aware of the Author's presence? Do you "take off your shoes" because you know you're standing on holy ground? Or are you busy gobbling up those yummy blackberries and then trying to tidy up afterwards?

Growing in the understanding of God's pervasive direction on our calling begins with a journey back to the book of beginnings, back to Genesis.

MEN AND WOMEN IN GOD'S IMAGE

"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to

Our likeness.’ . . . God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:26–27).

What does it mean to be created in God’s “image”? The Hebrew word that’s translated “image” in this verse (*tselem*) is the same word that’s used to describe idols, images that are made to *represent* false gods. (It is interesting, isn’t it, that God creates man in His image and man then seeks to create false images of God?) Another word that’s used in the verses above, “likeness” (*demūth*), is a word that simply means “to be like.” All humanity (men and women), then, are *equally* representations of God and are like Him in certain aspects. (In subsequent chapters, we’ll look at how the image of God in man was shattered in the Fall and how the image is being restored to believers in Christ.) But just what does that mean? In what ways are we like God? After all, there are some very definite differences between Him and us. How are we similar? Perhaps an illustration will help.

As I sit here writing in my cozy little office, I’ve got pictures of my family all around. I’ve got a picture of one son with his new, lovely bride. I’ve got a sweet picture of our daughter, when she was playing varsity softball, standing with Phil, who was an assistant coach. I’ve got another picture of our whole family—with both of our dear sons and our son-in-law—which we took at my in-law’s fiftieth wedding anniversary. I can sit and stare at these pictures and they bring back wonderful memories of sweet joys. But as much as I love these pictures, I have to say that they are just images. They are representations of what the family looked like a few years ago. They are not the real thing, although they are real representations.

In some ways, men and women are images of God the way that these pictures are images of our family. The pictures look similar, but they lack the depth, the animation, the life of the real people. You would wonder about my mental health if I sat around talking to my pictures or kissing them (like I did my autographed picture of the Beatles when I was a teenager) because they aren’t the “real thing.”

Although there are differences between our kids and their pictures, there are also similarities. You can get a little bit of an understanding of what the family looks like, and maybe even a little glimpse of how we interact, when you look at our pictures. And of course, the pictures themselves do capture certain visual aspects of their subjects.

What's more, we're always very pleased when we get our pictures back and they look just like reality as we remember it. "This looks just like you," we happily say. We love pictures that accurately freeze one moment of time and help us see what is no longer visible.

GOD'S PORTRAIT PAINTED THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSE

The Bible teaches that God possesses some qualities that belong to Him alone and other qualities that He shares. Some of the attributes God alone possesses include His infinity, changelessness, immensity, sovereignty, and freedom. God is also a Spirit, which means that He isn't limited by time or space. The attributes or qualities He shares in some measure with humanity include His holiness, righteousness, truth, love, mercy, patience, and goodness.

Thus people reflect or picture some of God's characteristics. I say that we reflect *some* of His attributes because even before sin entered the world, there was a great difference between our Creator and us, much like the difference between my family and their portraits. Before we look at the similarities between the Lord and ourselves, let's examine two of the differences.

HE'S THE CREATOR

God is the Creator, and we are His creation. He's absolutely independent, needing nothing to sustain His life. We're dependent upon Him for our very life. This vast difference will never change—even when we're in heaven and we enjoy unhindered fellowship with Him. There will always be a distinction between us. Paul preached

about this when he stood at the base of the Parthenon, where the Greeks worshiped their idols, on Mars Hill:

The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things. (Acts 17:24–25)

We need both the material creation (air, water, food, clothing) and people (in the sense that we need to love others and to learn from them) in order to survive. We're dependent upon God for everything.

HE'S SOVEREIGN

God is also the only One who always does exactly what He wants to do. The psalmist wrote, "Our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases" (Psalm 115:3). God is completely sovereign, which means that He rules as the King of all His creation, doing exactly what He wants when He wants. I know that even though I'm created in His image, I can't do whatever I want whenever I want (although I frequently forget this fact when zooming down the freeway).

Next we'll look at some of the qualities we have in common with God.

HE'S HOLY

God is holy in all He is and does. The Bible says that His holiness is so great it's "majestic" (Exodus 15:11)! And every day, He's exactly the same (because there is no "day" with Him). That God is holy means two things: First, that God is "other." He's different, He's weighty, He's not a vapor, He doesn't change. In this aspect of holiness, we're not like Him at all. But holiness has another meaning:

moral purity. We can't share in the first sense of His holiness—His “otherness”—but we can share in His virtue.

HE'S PERFECT IN EVERY WAY

God sees things as they really are; in fact, He understands everything about everything. Not only is our perception flawed, but even when we do observe correctly, our understanding of what we're seeing isn't always right. But God is different, as the psalmist writes: “Great is our Lord . . . His understanding is infinite” (Psalm 147:5). Knowledge, wisdom, and understanding are traits that God has shared with us.

God is also perfect in righteousness. That means that His character matches His perfect standard. Toward the end of his life, Moses sang of God's righteousness, “The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; . . . righteous and upright is He” (Deuteronomy 32:4). God's righteousness was perfectly displayed for us in the life of Jesus Christ. It's this righteousness that's been credited to us as Christians, as Paul wrote: “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). So, again, in one sense we share in God's righteousness, but in another sense we're growing in it. We can rejoice today that the Lord never fails in His work to transform and enlighten His children.

Finally, God is perfect in His love. In fact, John teaches that if you want to know what love really looks like, you have to look at God because “God is love” (1 John 4:8, italics added). Human love has boundaries, but God's love is so far-reaching that He sacrificed His one and only Son, the Son He loved, to bless those who hated Him. That kind of love amazes me! Our love for Him and for others will grow as we meditate on and seek to reflect His love for us to others. But He hasn't abandoned us or left us to accomplish this great love on our own. The Bible says that the “love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (Romans 5:5).

GOD'S IMAGE EVERYWHERE

Aside from these moral qualities, are there other areas in which *everyone* reflects God's image? John Calvin writes that the image of God with which Adam

was endowed is expressed by this word, when he had full possession of right understanding, when he had his affections kept within the bounds of reason, all his senses tempered in right order, and he truly referred his excellence to exceptional gifts bestowed upon him by his Maker. And although the primary seat of the divine image was in the mind and heart, or in the soul and its powers, *yet there was no part of man, not even the body itself, in which some sparks did not glow.*²

Let's look at what God called Adam and Eve to do when He first created them in order to get a sense of how they were to represent or image Him.

RULING LIKE HIM

God's first call to Adam and Eve was for them to rule over the creation. In ruling, they were being like God. God rules sovereignly over all creation as a great King, as 1 Chronicles 29:11 says: "Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O Lord, and You exalt Yourself as head over all."

Although we don't rule sovereignly, both Adam *and* Eve were called to rule under God's jurisdiction. In the Psalms, David wonders at the great privilege that's ours in representing God in this way. "What is man that You take thought of him? . . . You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet" (Psalm 8:4, 6).

After God created Adam, He planted a special place for him to

dwelt: a beautiful mountaintop garden. He then placed Adam there and gave him a specific calling. He was to cultivate and keep the garden. Adam also ruled over creation by naming all the animals and by observing the seasons and the world that God had created. God called him to subdue all of creation for his own use and God's glory.

We continue to rule over creation even today. Men and women explore the nature of hurricanes, examine microbes, repave streets, work to make life better. Why? Because of God's imprint on our souls. We're fulfilling God's calling. Just think about it: even little children reflect God when they build sand castles or explore the shore for seashells. When we're involved in honorable work, even if it doesn't directly consist of Christian ministry, we're mirroring one of God's attributes. Why? Because God works and rules. Men and women are called to be God's coregents, working and ruling in His world, under His authority, for our happiness and His glory. Wives who are helping their husbands rule are also growing in God's call. Not only do we reflect Him when we rule over the world, we also associate with others as He does.

RELATING LIKE HIM

God created Adam and Eve as male and female. He could have made two men or even another sort of creature for Adam, but instead He created one who was like Adam in his humanness, yet differing from him both in his physique and calling.

As we ponder this truth, it becomes apparent that God loves variety. In fact, variety itself reflects God's image. Remember who He is? He says that He is a Trinity: One God, three persons. There aren't three Fathers, or three Sons. No, God in His perfection is diverse, yet the same. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all the same in their being (all equally God), yet different in their functions.

These differences are seen in creation itself. God the *Father* spoke the world into existence, but it was God the *Son* who was the Word carrying out His decrees. God the *Spirit* moved over the waters,

“sustaining and manifesting God’s immediate presence in His creation.”³ We see this diversity in our redemption, as well. For God the “Father planned redemption and sent His Son into the world [and] the Holy Spirit was sent by the Father and the Son to apply redemption to us.”⁴ Do you see how the members of the Trinity are the same (equally and fully God) and yet different (with differing functions or roles)?

Men and women are similar to God in that aspect. We are the same (equally and fully human and in His image) and yet we are different (with both similar and differing callings). (We’re going to look very deeply at the differences in our callings in chapter 2.) Isn’t God’s wisdom amazing? This point will be very important when we talk about a woman’s specific calling as a helper in the next chapter. For now, though, just remember that both *men and women are the same in essence* (as are the members of the Godhead) and that we have differing callings (also as God does), although both men and women are called first to glorify and enjoy God and reflect Him to the rest of His creation.

REPRODUCING LIKE HIM

Third, God called Adam and Eve to be “fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Genesis 1:28). In doing that, they were being like Him because that’s just what He did. From His person a world sprang forth in His likeness, filled with His children. Paul called people the “children of God” when he was preaching to the unbelieving Greeks about creation: “The God who made the world and all things in it . . . gives to all people life and breath and all things; and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth . . . being then the children of God” (Acts 17:24–26, 29).

There is a difference, of course, between those who are generally part of humanity and those who are specifically part of God’s redeemed family. All humans are His children in the sense that they

are created in His image and that He lovingly sustains their lives. Only believers, however, can claim to be God's children in the sense that they are in relation with Him as their Father.

God has invited us to reflect Him by having children. Similar to Him, we have children after our likeness. People reproduce in other ways aside from having children, too. We teach, mentor, and disciple others who are not directly a part of our biological family.

Of course, here's another place where our differences are very plain. God creates; we do not. We procreate after our likeness, but we don't come up with something that's completely new, nor do we create something out of nothing simply by the word of our power. But still, the picture is there, isn't it?

REFLECTING LIKE HIM

On the sixth day of creation, God reflected on what He had done and pronounced it "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Like Him, we reflect on or ponder the rightness of all we see. In fact, that's something we do all the time. The outrage we experience while viewing pictures of the Holocaust mirrors God's moral judgments. Not only do we reflect in this way, we almost always communicate these thoughts (just as God did when He said that His creation was "very good"). Of course, God's judgment is never wrong, and ours may be, but the ability to discern and reflect is like Him.

Isn't it amazing that after He pronounced everything "good" at creation, God declared that there was something in His world that was "not good"? What was the one detail that lacked His approval? God declared that it wasn't good for Adam to be alone: "Then the Lord God said, 'It is *not good* for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him'" (Genesis 2:18; italics added). So He took steps to remedy the situation—He created Eve, similar to the way that we want to correct situations that we deem unhappy or lacking.

By the way, God wasn't taken by surprise at Adam's need for a helper. He didn't think, *Oops! I better make a woman!* God waited

until Adam discerned what he needed, after he had observed all the animals (Genesis 2:20). God had always planned to make men *and* women because men and women *together* reflect His nature of diversity and unity. We can be sure that God planned to make both men and women before He created Adam because we (redeemed men and women) were chosen in Him “*before* the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4, italics added). (We’ll look more deeply into Eve’s creation in chapter 2.)

REJOICING LIKE HIM

After all of the time that Adam must have spent observing the animals, seeing them in pairs, and reflecting on his own lack of one that corresponded to him, it shouldn’t be surprising that the very first statement we hear from Adam is one of praise and rejoicing. Adam said, “This *at last* is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man” (Genesis 2:23, italics added).⁵

The ability and desire to praise what brings us pleasure is simply a reflection of the adoration that has always existed within the Trinity. As John Piper writes, God “rejoiced in the image of His glory in the person of His Son.”⁶ God revels in goodness (Hebrews 2:12), and because He does, so do we.

RESTING LIKE HIM

The creation story ends with God observing all that He had done and pronouncing it “very good” (Genesis 1:31). God completed all His work in six days, and on the seventh He rested as He observed the wisdom and magnificence of all that He had done. He then set the seventh day apart by blessing it as a time for the most special and pleasing enjoyment of man: to revel in the sweet joy of fellowship with his Creator and to observe His great acts. When Adam and Eve were commanded to observe the Sabbath rest they weren’t told to

spend the day napping. They were to spend it in communion with their Lord and enjoyment of one another.

HIS ABIDING IMAGE

Are you beginning to see how God's image permeates all His creation? His image permeates men and women in ways we've only just begun to see in this chapter. He's called us to rule, relate, reproduce, reflect, rejoice, and rest like Him. Not only does His image fill all the world and everyone in it, but it is particularly being re-created in those of us who are His redeemed children. This should cause your heart to be filled with confidence. If God could imprint His image on all mankind one day thousands of years ago, so that we perpetually reflect Him even now, then He can flood your heart and change you to be more and more like Him today.

We've just begun to see how we already reflect God's image, and I trust that these pictures have created a fresh vision and hope for growth in your heart. God remains faithful, and He'll give us everything we need to grow into our calling as women and helpers. Take a few moments now, though, to reflect on the ways that the world reflects Him and allow your heart to rejoice in your great King.

Finding and Fulfilling Your Calling

- 1. Review the five Rs that point out how all God's children image Him. In what ways do you see yourself, as a woman, doing this? In what ways is thinking in this way new for you?*

- a. Ruling over creation. *Frequently your specific gifting is key to your call to rule. We can't rule over everything in the world, nor are we called to. We are called, however, to be faithful to rule within the sphere of influence and with the specific giftings He's given us. How can you use your gifting to bring your garden under God's dominion?*

- b. Relating to other people. *Ask yourself: "How am I furthering God's reign in my relationships with others, particularly my husband? How can I help him relate to others in a more God-honoring way?"*

- c. Reproducing others. *Ask yourself, "Whom has God placed in my life for me to nurture?" This should be more than natural children, although the nurturing of children is a major facet of this calling. What qualities of the Spirit is God working in you? How can you reproduce that in others?*

- d. Reflecting on God and the creation around you. *Ask yourself: "How am I growing in loving God with all my mind? What areas of interest has God given me that I might pursue for His glory and the good of others?"*

- e. Rejoicing in Him. *Ask yourself: "What divine qualities are most precious to me? How much time do I spend meditating on God's character and then praising Him for who He is? Is my life marked by joy or drudgery?"*

- f. Resting in communion with Him. *If you feel that you don't have time to do any of the above, may I suggest that you begin to look at the Sabbath as the great day when you can return (in a sense) to the garden to walk with Him and enjoy His presence and rule in your life?*

2. *Begin to think about what it means to you, as a woman, to rule, in light of the fact that you're also called to be a helper. Write out your thoughts.*

3. *How does the unity and diversity of the Trinity impact your view of yourself as a woman? Do you really rejoice in God's love of variety?*

4. *First Corinthians 13:12 says, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known." We dimly reflect or grasp the wonder of God's majesty and glory here on earth. The Bible teaches, though, that there will come a day when we will see Him face-to-face and know Him more fully. Write out a prayer of rejoicing as you anticipate that day.*

5. *I frequently find myself reading through a chapter of a book without being aware of what's written there. So I've found that it's helpful to try to summarize the teaching of the chapter in three or four points before I leave it and forget what I just read. May I encourage you to do the same at the end of every chapter? That way you'll compel yourself to think more deeply about the main themes of the book, and you'll have a record of what you're learning.*