

Brandywine Valley Church  
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The Reason You Were Made  
Genesis 1:26-28

## Introduction

Good morning, Brandywine Valley Church! I hope you're all ready for a journey through the concept of 'Imago Dei' today.

Last week, we explored the profound significance of our origin story, rooted in Genesis. Unlike the secular narratives around us, we are here because of God! In the Beginning, God spoke creation into existence. We're not an accident. **You are not an accident!** Every person has value and purpose because we were created by God. That's our origin story!

Today, we embark on a journey through the picture "Imago Dei," diving into the image of God. As we navigate the tension between secular narratives and God's original design, our focus turns to the core question: **What is our purpose?**

But before we dive into the deep waters of theology, let's lighten the mood a bit. Can you imagine if God had a 'creation bloopers' reel?

Picture God's first conversation about creating humans. I can almost hear the angels saying, off in the distance... 'You sure, God? They might need a lot of guidance. These humans are going to need a lot of divine intervention.'"

Today, we'll get to the true meaning embedded in the Imago Dei.

Secularism tells us that we have the ability to create and determine our own meaning. But in this message, we will learn that God designed humanity with a clear meaning – not self-created – but given by God alone.

## Scripture: Genesis 1:26-28

### Genesis 1:26

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."

## Genesis 1:27

So God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

## Genesis 1:28

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

## Reflecting God's Image - The Imago Dei

The terms "image of God" and "likeness" are used to describe the creation of humanity.

There is a general understanding that the Hebrew words for "image of God" and "likeness" convey the idea of **humanity sharing in the nature and characteristics of God.**

**Image of God (צֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים - tzelem Elohim)** suggests a representation, resembling, or reflecting God's nature. It implies a unique dignity and role for humanity that distinguishes us from the rest of creation. We reflect his image! Like holding **up a Mirror!**

**Likeness (דְּמוּת - demuth)** is understood as conveying a similarity. It complements the idea of the "image of God," emphasizing a correspondence or likeness in some aspects of human nature to that of God. **In some real way, we are like God!**

Think of it this way... the Image of God is the mirror, as we look upon God in all His Glory. And like a mirror...something is reflected back. The Likeness of God is seeing something like Him in your reflection, but also seeing yourself. Your reflection, your image looks like God, and is like God. But this reflection goes beyond physical resemblance. It's part of your essence.

When we look into the likeness of God...into his perfect mirror...we see the most beautiful version of ourselves. We see us as he sees us!

Together, these terms emphasize the special relationship and shared characteristics between humans and God in their creation, and point to our unique purpose among all created beings.

## God's Trinitarian Self Reflected in The Imago Dei:

God begins creating humanity with a conversation within the Trinity. Let "us" make mankind in "our" image. Imago Dei reflects the unity, love, and relationship of Trinitarian God Collaboration of Father, Son, and Spirit in creation: the mirror

Imagine Father, Son, Spirit: "It's time to create something using our pattern!" But they didn't need a mirror. Out of this trinity, we find the depths of how we reflect His image as Father, Son & Spirit.

There are 4 words that we'll use to describe the Image of God:

### The Imago Dei: Essence | Relationship | Worship | Purpose

#### Essence:

**We are soul beings with individual uniqueness and a common purpose.** We reflect God in the depths of our soul. In our uniqueness, each of us can speak back to God in a personal way. God creates us in his image, speaking to us: "Look around, this is all yours; and look at ME, I am yours; and I'll look at you and see in your face the reflection of my own glory. That is your end, that is why you were created – to worship Me, glorify Me, and have Me as yours forever." Ponder that for a moment... you are made like the trinity. That's part of your make up.

Tomorrow, as we celebrate the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., let's reflect and take action on unity among humanity. In his sermon on February 28, 1954, titled "Rediscovering Lost Values," Dr. King reflected on the concept of Imago Dei and the equality of all individuals in the eyes of God:

"The whole concept of the imago Dei is the idea that all men have something within them that God injected. Not that they have substantial unity with God, but that every man has a capacity to have fellowship with God. And this gives him a uniqueness, it gives him worth, it gives him dignity."

"And we must never forget this as a nation: there are not gradations in the image of God... We will know one day that God made us to live together as brothers and to respect the dignity and worth of every man." - Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Every individual has the capacity for fellowship with God, giving them uniqueness, worth, and dignity.

## **Relationship: An invitation in the cool of the Garden**

Upon creation, there's a significant moment – God speaks, for the first time, to His creation. His first spoken word **is a Blessing** (Genesis 1:28). God steps back and speaks to His creation! 'Be fruitful – planted in a garden, surrounded by fruit, inviting into a fruitful life. Multiply, increase – Get married and have children!'

To fully understand the Image of God, peek into the Garden as described in Genesis two. At Adam's creation, God breathed his breath into his lungs. He placed him in a Garden... and even after Adam & Eve took fruit from the forbidden tree, God came looking for them in the cool of the garden. God walks and talks with his creation because they are made in his image! God anticipated the relationship he would have with his Imago Dei.

## **Worship: Responding to the Presence of God**

Something in humanity responded to the presence of God like nothing else in all God's creation. Out of this relationship flowed the marvelous dynamic of worship.

We often think of prayer as conversation with God. And when we pray...we think of ourselves as the initiator. We come to God in prayer. God...can you...?

But it's a little different...our prayers are a response...and that's what worship is... responding to the marvelous glory of God. God spoke to us first... we prayed to him second.

Relationship & Worship guide us into our purpose.

## **Purpose:**

Out of this relationship, humanity has a mandate to represent God to the rest of creation. To all of creation – we are the being most like God.

God instructs: Subdue the Earth, Rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and the livestock and wild animals on the ground. Rule over the vast land, explore to the edges, travel deeply with people, and discover where we should go. This exploring spirit is rooted in our purpose and our original mission to rule the earth.

## **Why would God ask us to subdue and rule?**

A realm is a place where our choice determines what happens. We were made to have dominion within an appropriate space. This is the core of the image or likeness of God in us – an opportunity to represent God to all of creation while remaining under his Lordship and authority, to be his Ambassador. This is an opportunity to work alongside God and in His strength. But it had the potential to go wrong.

If you've ever raised a child or supervised someone in an internship, you know how important it is to let them try things. Have you ever tried to explain a game to someone, and then you realize, "Let's just play the game! It will make sense as we play." God is saying... let them try it.

**God is saying... let them try it.**

### **Biblical Illustration – The Pageant:**

When my children were little, they put on a pageant for mom and dad. My youngest, Mercy... was just old enough to speak in a cute little voice. Up in our attic - the four kids planned the Pageant for hours, gathering our clothes for costumes, gathering household items for scenes and props. They made tickets, set up a row of chairs, and then it was showtime.

As a Father, it's one of my favorite memories. But I'll never forget something I noticed during the pageant. Each child got caught up in details that seemed less important to me. They would get mad if someone messed up a line or fidgeted with their costume. They would get frustrated if they didn't get their own line right, as if getting it right determined my enjoyment of their performance. Afterward, they were talking about how they messed up their lines.

In that moment, I saw as a Father sees – these little ones were in my likeness, with a heart to please their Father. Yet, they were so caught up in their costumes and roles, as if perfection was required.

This Pageant Picture unlocked something for me. Maybe it can unlock something in your life today.

We were created to rule this realm in God's power...and to enjoy relationship with Him along the way. But we so easily get caught up in our lines, our roles, and our own agenda... each one of us has gone our own way.

### **What has SIN done to the Imago Dei?**

#### **Two Great Lies of Modern Secularism:**

Secularism bombards us with two lies – attacking our worth:

#### **Lie #1: You are Worthless**

In subtle and obvious ways, modern secularism leads us down a path that attacks a person's worth. You're Worthless, You don't matter, you're not important, Your life has no point, You are here by accident, You are insignificant.

**Remember the Movie Snow White?** In "Snow White," the mirror holds significant symbolic importance. The magic mirror, often personified as the Evil Queen's mirror, is a tool she uses to seek affirmation of her beauty. The mirror reflects not only physical appearance but also the Queen's inner vanity and insecurity. The phrase "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?" highlights the Queen's obsession with external beauty and her desire for validation. The mirror serves as a powerful metaphor for the destructive impact of vanity and the consequences of defining one's worth solely based on outward appearances.

We can no longer answer the question, 'Who am I?' because we are primarily living in horizontal comparison.

We see this lie take shape in the younger son in Jesus' parable - The Prodigal Son. A Father had two sons, and the younger one asked for his share of the inheritance in advance. The younger son then went to a distant country and squandered all his wealth in reckless living. Soon, a severe famine struck the land, and the young man found himself in great need. He decided to return to his father, confessing his mistakes and acknowledging that he was no longer worthy to be called his father's son. He dreamed of serving as a servant in His Father's Kingdom. To the son's surprise, instead of condemnation, his father welcomed him with open arms. The father even threw a celebration, expressing joy and forgiveness for the return of his lost son.

The son started to believe the lie that, because of his sin, he had lost his identity as a son. He was now worthless, at best a servant in his Father's Kingdom.

## **Lie #2 - You are the Worth the Most**

The older son in the Prodigal parable is resentful when he learns that his father has welcomed back his younger brother. The older son had remained faithful, working diligently for his father. He feels that his loyalty and hard work should be rewarded and is upset that his father is celebrating the return of the wayward younger brother. The older son refuses to join the celebration, expressing frustration and a sense of injustice. This perspective highlights the tendency, in our good works, to overstate our importance. As we look out at how bad everyone else is, we begin to think we are worth more.

We see this tendency in the world today – people believe they are the main point. While not spoken this way, they operate as their own gods, taking full control of their destiny.

Secularism and sin lead us to both extremes – questioning our self-worth, leading to mental health problems and depression, or overestimating our importance, focusing on material accumulation and success. We've lost our true identity!

Let's sit with that for a moment. How has modern secularism, the lies of the enemy, and the pull of secular culture misshaped your personal view of yourself? Have you forgotten what it means to bear the image of God, both as a blessing, an identity, and a purpose?

What about you – which lie are you most prone to believe?

Do you ever feel worthless, or worth less? // Or do you at times overstate your own importance? Live life on your own agenda? How would you plot yourself this week?

### **Restoring the Image through the Gospel:**

Through a surprising reversal of roles, Jesus steps into our likeness to heal and restore the distorted image of God.

### **Philippians 2:6-7**

"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be held onto; instead, he made himself nothing taking **the form of a servant**, being made **in human likeness**."

### **Philippians 2:8**

"And being **found in appearance as a man**, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!"

**The Great Reversal of the Gospel is this, Jesus takes on our image, our likeness.**

### **Defining Ourselves as Beloved by God AND LIVING FROM THAT IDENTITY:**

We often get beat up in the world, and quickly our worth, purpose, identity, and self-worth get attacked. Have you ever talked to someone emerging from a brutal divorce? Is their sense of security intact? Do they have a strong sense of self-worth? Do they still feel like a beloved child, or does God only love them in their "goodness," or even more daunting, does he love them less in their brokenness?

Bennan Manning, in his book *Abba's Child*, explores the theme of identity and self-worth in the context of Christian faith. The book invites readers to let go of self-condemnation and perfectionism, embracing the reality of being cherished by God as His beloved children.

*"The heart of it is this: to make the Lord and his immense love for you constitutive of your personal worth. Define yourself radically as one beloved by God. God's love for you and his choice of you constitute your worth. Accept that, and let it become the most important thing in your life."* - Brennan Manning - *Abba's Child* page 51.

Define yourself radically as one beloved by God. God's love for you and his choice of you constitute your worth! You bear his image, his identity, and his likeness! This should lead us not to pride but humility. But in that humility, we must not lose sight of who we really are.

## Conclusion:

As we return home, hoping to be a prodigal that can return as a servant in the Kingdom, we are received as a daughter, a son, and invited into celebration at the return of our true identity – a child of God!

As we conclude our journey through the profound truth of Imago Dei, I want to leave you with this: Just like God had a plan even when Adam messed up his lines in the garden pageant, He has a plan for you.

**You are defined radically as one beloved by God.** Now, go out, live as beloved children, and maybe share a smile or two along the way – allow your facial expressions and your inner heart reflect this amazing image - the image of God in you!"

**The Restored Imago Dei:** Essence, Relationship, Worship, Purpose

Let's not allow this message to merely linger in our minds but take root in our hearts and actions. Here are some practical ways we can apply the truths we've explored today:

### (1) Journal your Thoughts:

Take time this week for personal reflection. Consider how secular narratives and personal experiences may have influenced your self-perception. Journal your thoughts and emotions, and bring them before God in prayer. Allow His truth to reshape your understanding of who you are.

### (2) Practical Daily Reminders:

Integrate practical steps into your daily life. Set reminders or affirmations of your identity in God. Establish a routine of prayer and scripture reading to reinforce the truth of being made in His image. Challenge negative self-talk with the promises found in God's Word.

### (3) Counseling and Support:

If you find yourself struggling with distorted self-worth, remember that seeking help is a courageous step. Our church offers counseling resources and support groups. Reach out, knowing that you are not alone, and there is a community ready to walk alongside you on your journey to healing.

### (4) Living Out Imago Dei in Relationships:

Embrace humility by actively serving others. Look for opportunities to engage in acts of kindness and outreach within your community. Let the love of God expressed through your actions counteract the selfish narratives of the world.



Transform your relationships by intentionally embodying the essence of God's image. Practice love, kindness, and forgiveness in your interactions. Let the reflection of God's character in your relationships be a testimony to the transformative power of understanding and living out your identity in Christ.

**(5) Continued Scriptural Exploration:**

Keep exploring the depths of God's Word. Dive into additional scripture readings or study plans that reinforce the concept of Imago Dei. Let the Scriptures be a continual source of revelation and understanding as you grow in your knowledge of God's design for you.

As we apply these truths, may our lives increasingly reflect the restored Imago Dei: Essence, Relationship, Worship, and Purpose. Let us go forth, living as beloved children of God, confidently defined by His love and grace.