

# Unit 4



## The Image of God

*Why You Are More Than Just a Smart Mammal*

### TRUTH

#### by memory – Psalm 8:3-5 (ESV)

*"When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, <sup>4</sup>what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? <sup>5</sup>Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor."*

#### in Bible –

Over the last few weeks you have learned how a philosophical commitment to naturalism has led the scientific community to disallow the possibility of a supernatural explanation of the origin of our universe and the origin of life. You have also seen that this commitment is not based on scientifically observed data, and in fact, conveniently throws aside the very methodology that modern science claims to be built upon. The battle between modern science and the Bible is a battle of worldviews. It is not an argument about the facts that can be observed, but the explanations offered to account for them.

In contrast to the modern scientific worldview that all life has descended from a common ancestor, you saw the Bible's teaching that all life shares a common Designer. This week you will examine the specifics of God's design of human life. Human beings were given a unique position in creation, and that position demands that our view of the world be in harmony with our Creator's intention.

If you use the **in Bible** scriptures in your personal worship, be sure to include the elements of **PRAISE**. If you find yourself struggling with how and what to pray try engaging with God following the pattern Jesus taught in the Lord's Prayer, which we call the **5 Targets of Prayer**.

**Pray First – Read the text – Ask Questions – Interpret in Context – Summarize applications – Engage with God**

**God's Honor    God's Kingdom    God's Provision    God's Forgiveness    God's Power**

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**Genesis 1:24-31; 2:7-9** – The account of God’s work on the sixth day of creation reveals the unique role He intended humanity to assume in creation. Genesis 2:7-9 provides additional information about the uniqueness of human beings.

Read these verses carefully – keeping the rest of the creation account in mind – and make a list of the ways that human beings are unique within creation. You should be able to list at least 6 items.

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The phrase "*image of God*" is important for understanding the biblical teaching of the nature and dignity of humanity. The Hebrew words translated "*image*" and "*likeness*" are roughly synonymous, often used together to mean *a copy, a representation of an original*. This may be a copy of a living being (a king or a calf), a heavenly body (the sun or moon) or a divine figure (God, an angel, or a false god such as Baal).

**Genesis 5:1,3** – These verses provide additional insight into the meaning of the phrase "*image of God*".

Compare verse 1 with verse 3. What does this reveal about what it means to be made in God’s image?

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**Genesis 9:6** – This verse reveals the value God places on His image bearers, even though they have fallen from glory into sin.

How would you describe the value God places on individuals because they bear His image?

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**Psalm 8** – This worshipful meditation on God’s majesty includes David’s musings on the value God places on humanity. As David reflects on the creation account in Genesis, he provides a revealing interpretation of what it means to be made in God’s image. [Note: For a better understanding of the first part of verse 5, compare it with Hebrews 2:7.]

Compare Psalm 8:5-6 with Genesis 1:27-28 and Genesis 5:1, 3. Based on these verses, describe what you think it means to be made in God’s image.

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How does the teaching that we are made in God’s image impact your understanding of human dignity and value? What about the dignity of a criminal? A foreigner? A homeless person? A mentally-challenged person? Someone you don’t like?

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**Psalm 139:13-18** – This passage offers a different look at how God values each person.

What does this passage teach you about God’s creation and the value of every individual? What does it say about your value?

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## to summarize –

One universal truth about all people is that everyone wants to believe they are significant. No one wants to believe, “I don’t matter,” not even the person who finds this easy to believe. Whether by the pursuit of fame or material possessions, social status, a significant relationship, business accomplishments or political influence, everyone longs for confirmation that, “I’m important! The world wouldn’t be better off without me.” Now, you may recall from the first unit of Gospel Living that lasting significance (called, *glory*) can only be found in relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Jesus, Himself, *is* our hope of glory (see Colossians 1:27). In this unit, you will get to the root of why our significance can only be found in Him. It has to do with the way we were designed.

What is design? It is the creation of something for a specific purpose or function. Consider this analogy: Imagine that a bird feeder hanging from a tree had the power to think and feel. What could possibly make this imaginary bird feeder feel significant? – If it could fulfill the purpose for which it was designed, of course. A bird feeder is designed to function as a container for bird seed that should attract birds to it. Unless it is amply stocked with bird seed and unless there are plenty of birds drawn to feed, it could never feel significant. In the same way, people have been designed with a specific purpose, the fulfillment of which is the key to true significance. St. Augustine wisely summarized that purpose when he said in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, “You made us for Yourself. And our hearts are not at rest until they find their rest in You.” Notice the first part of this quote, *You have made us for Yourself*. Augustine was saying that God designed people to experience companionship with Him. Without this, our hearts cannot be at rest. In other words, we cannot enjoy a true sense of significance – a conviction that we matter – apart from His companionship because that is how He designed us.

Now, let us ask what it is about our design that makes us unique? Why are human beings different from the rest of God’s creatures? Naturalists, who deny that we are purposefully designed, argue that we are not actually unique. Humans are just the latest and smartest development in an evolutionary lineage of mammals – primates, to be specific, with which we share much of the same DNA. And since human beings were not designed, it follows that we have no special purpose. But, this is not the portrait of human kind that the Bible presents. Scripture tells us that there is a crucial component of your being that exists by God’s design. It defines your purpose in a way that your DNA never can. It marks you as unique in all of creation and gives you the possibility of experiencing true significance. It is called *the image of God*.

Scripture introduces us to the truth that human beings are made in God’s image and likeness. In Genesis 1:26 we read, “*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.*” From this we understand that God intended to design humanity to be like Him in some aspect of our being. The Hebrews words for image and likeness indicate that God was making a copy of Himself. But, in what way? It cannot

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be that our physical bodies are like Him, for God is spirit and has no physical being. It also cannot be that our gender is like God, for He created both men and women in His image (Genesis 1:27). So, what is the image of God? Clues can be found simply by observing the ways in which human beings are portrayed as unique in the creation story. The following can be said to be true *only* of humanity:

- They were intended to rule over all other creatures (1:26)
- They were designed so that both genders would bear His image and likeness (1:27)
- God spoke with them (1:28-30)
- They were commanded to fill the earth, subduing it and the animals inhabiting it (1:28)
- They were instructed about food for themselves and the animals (1:29-30)
- They received the breathe of God (2:7)
- They were given a training ground where they would learn to fulfill their purpose (2:8-9)

All of these things are connected to our spiritual and rational nature. From these we see that men and women have the capacity to commune with God, to hear and understand God's voice, to receive His commands and learn from Him. We have the capacity to rule over, and order His creation (with the authority He delegates to us) in service to Him. These faculties are what caused David to observe that, though humanity is seemingly small and weak in the world, God treats us royally, crowning us with glory and honor (Psalm 8:5). Another clue about the image of God comes from Genesis 5:3, "*When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.*" The important thing to note here is that the phrase, *in his [Adam's] own image and likeness*, is used to describe Adam's son, Seth. Seth was an *image* of Adam. From this we learn a most important truth: To be created in God's image is to be a son or daughter of God. The image of God then, is that glorious component of the soul of humanity that empowers to commune with God and serve Him as His royal children.

It is this design that makes us valuable, more so than any of God's other creatures. The post-flood prohibition of, and penalty for, murder is grounded in the inherent value of being made in God's image, "*Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.*" (Genesis 9:6). In Psalm 139:13-16 we see a different expression of God's high valuation of humanity. The psalmist paints an intimate picture of the care with which God forms His most treasured creatures:

*"For you formed my inward parts;  
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*

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*Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.  
My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.  
Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them,  
the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them."*

What can you imagine that could possibly grant a more certain guarantee of significance than being designed in the image of God and fulfilling that design by living in relationship with Him? In the end, significance and value is determined by God, not us. And people become most aware of their own significance when they discover that they are dearly loved likenesses of their Father God.

Let's think this through for a moment more. Think of the implications of the fact that all men and women are designed in the image of God. Though we are fallen creatures, still that image remains. It is our value, our significance to God as His image bearers, that explains His willingness to redeem people from sin. Our value to God as His image bearers is the root of human dignity. Therefore, ethnic, socio-economic, cultural and intellectual differences are of no account by comparison. The fundamental reason for compassion, ministries of evangelism, mercy and justice is not just that we are all of the same race; it is that we are all of the *most valuable* race. If we are only a sub-class of accidentally smart mammals, there is no ground for compassion. Instead, we should be competing for resources to ensure the survival of our blood lines. But you and your fellow man were designed to belong to God, to commune with Him as your loving Father and Master. And you and your fellow man can only find true significance in His embrace.

**online –**

Remember to visit [www.perimeter.org/discipleshipcurriculum](http://www.perimeter.org/discipleshipcurriculum) for this week's downloadable audio, video, or print resources.

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## MISSION – DIALOGUING

*"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes..."* (Romans 1:16, ESV)

Remember that the Christian's mission is to take up Christ's mission to make His gospel known through word and deed. During this section of *The Journey* you are focusing on an approach to sharing the message of the gospel in a non-threatening, conversational way. At the same time, don't forget to continue the daily habit of praying for people on your prayer list and to be involved serving the least and lost across the street, track and ocean however God gives you opportunity.

So far in this series you have learned a conversational approach to introducing The Answer and the *Life Issues* booklets. See if you can repeat the outlines here.

### **Introducing The Answer**

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### **Introducing the *Life Issues* booklets**

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The *Life Issues* booklets are effective "CliffNotes"/"SparkNotes" type tools for investigating the big questions about Christ and Christianity that most people would want to resolve during such an investigation. Each booklet investigates a critical issue of the Christian faith in a simple, straight forward manner, and also contains several chapters of the Gospel of John. The goal is to assist a person in investigating their questions about the Christian faith, while at the same time exposing them to the life of Christ described in God's Word. Thus, these booklets rely on the spiritual power and intellectual credibility of God's Word to convert the seeking soul.

When you offer these booklets, suggest that the person read one at a time and afterwards meet with you to discuss any questions s/he may have. Reassure him or her that there will be no arm twisting. You should also encourage him or her to read a little bit of the chapters in John daily, rather than all

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