

Study 3. We love humanity

Big idea: despite the fall, humanity still bears the image of God.

Who do people say you look like? (Famous people, relatives, etc)

Observation and interpretation

You could feedback these observations on a diagram - for example, by drawing two stick figures in the middle of a large sheet of paper, with arrows up, sideways and below to label each relationship. Then when it comes time in the second part of the exercise to address how the fall affects those relationships you could use a different colour pen over the top.

Read Genesis 1:26-31. What does being in the image of God mean for the following relationships?

- ↑ Between us and God
- ↔ Between male and female
- ↓ Between us and the rest of creation

The use of the plural "us" and "we." A variety of suggestions have been offered here as to why God speaks in the plural. The most likely are:

- That he is speaking to his heavenly court
- That it is a literary device - called "a plural of self deliberation" which depicts God's inner monologue as a conversation
- That the plural incorporates the Spirit (mentioned earlier in Genesis) or even the whole Trinity (though obviously the original author cannot have known this).

The words "image" and "likeness". "Image" is a rare word, used for pictures of men (Ezekiel 16:17) idols (Number 33:52) or even medical models (1 Samuel 6:5!!!). "Likeness" suggests a similar idea of resembling or representing something.

Again, lots of different interpretations of these ideas are offered. Some point to certain abilities or faculties which we share with God (like reason, speech, free-will, or spiritual capacities), or even to a similarity of physical appearance. Other interpretations emphasise relational aspects: our role as rulers in God's place (his representatives) on earth, or our capacity for relationship with God.

Most of these ideas have something going for them, so rather than try to narrowly define it we suggest focusing on all the implications of being in the image of God suggested by the text.

Read Genesis 2:7. What does it mean for us to be created "from dust"?

Divide up these passages. How does the fall affect these relationships?

- Genesis 3:1-19
- Genesis 9:6-7
- Psalm 8
- 1 Corinthians 15:20-22, 45-49

Read these passages. How does Christ restore or affirm the image of God in us?

- John 17:21-23
- 2 Corinthians 4:4

Implications

- In what ways do our political systems honour the principle that all humanity bears the “image of God”? In what ways do they flaunt it?
- What does this understanding of the “image of God” contribute to our discussions about:
 - Conservation
 - Euthanasia
 - Asylum seekers
 - Aged care
 - Treatment of human remains (including in medical research)

Prayer ideas

Perhaps you could pick a charity which is involved in advocating for the dignity of human life. Members of the group could volunteer to find out about what they’re doing and how you can pray for their work. Some ideas:

- International Justice Mission: <http://www.ijm.org.au/>
- World Vision Australia <http://worldvision.com.au/>
- Anglicare <https://www.anglicare.org.au/>
- HammondCare <http://www.hammond.com.au/>
- Common Grace <http://www.commongrace.org.au/>