

The Image of God in the Woman

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Preacher: Dave Nannery

[0 : 0 0] Well, we're continuing our series on the Imago Dei, which is Latin for the image of God, the image of God in every human being. And so this is number four out of five. We've talked about the image of God in the self, the image of God in our neighbor, the image of God in the man.

We'll be talking about the image of God in the woman today. And then next week, the image of God in the created world. Last week, we began the sermon, the image of God with the man with some survey results. And the first survey question, the one that we considered last week was this, if all the men in the world were to disappear and be replaced with women, what would be lost? If all the men in the world were to disappear and be replaced with women, what would be lost? And we got a lot of confusion. So those of us who asked people that we knew that question got a lot of confused answers. This week, we're considering the counterpart to that question. The other side of the coin, if all the women in the world were to disappear and be replaced with men, what would be lost? If all the women in the world were to disappear and be replaced with men, what would be lost? Do you have a clear answer to that question?

If you don't, that's a problem. If you don't, that fundamentally tells you, you don't understand what men and women are for. What would be lost? It's a question I heard first asked by Paul Dirks, who grew up in this church. And it's just such a useful way of understanding what people really think about men and women. And as you might expect, a few people had some interesting answers to that one.

If there were no women, then no need for telephones. All men, the world would be like Lord of the Flies or like Donald Trump ruled the planet.

If all the women were replaced, there would be fewer children and perhaps less drama. Now, when we asked this question about men, people were left with few answers about what unique value men bring to the world. Now, with women, we did actually get a lot of responses and responses that seemed to revolve around a single set of themes. Women are more about feelings. Men miss out on this.

[2 : 2 7] Women are more compassionate. Women are more nurturing. Women generally are nurturers and the keeper of families and relationships. A lot of respondents saw women shining brightly as they nurtured others. And as with the men, several people talked about balance, the need for both men and women. That you need both, not just to produce children, but that our society, our culture, our world needs both men and women. That's something terrible would be missed. Men and women were viewed as interdependent. We need one another. As one person put it, I think the loss of either would be devastating. It would be devastating. And that perspective is entirely in line with God's word.

Entirely in line with the Bible and what the Bible says about men and women. And the Apostle Paul writes about that in 1 Corinthians chapter 11. Here's what he says. In the Lord, woman is not independent of man, nor man of woman. For as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman, and all things are from God. And that's the way that God designed men and women to be, to be interdependent beings. Now in our culture, it is often assumed that men are strong and independent, and now we are urging women also. They need to be strong and independent too. And so now we've got men who are strong and independent, women who are strong and independent. And that is not at all the way that God designed us to be. God designed both men and women to be interdependent. Woman is not independent of man, nor man of woman. We rely on one another. We need one another. We complement one another. Men badly need women. Women badly need men. Now we learned about men last week, what God's word says men are for. We learned that the assignment and glory of every man is to cultivate and to protect every person and resource that God has entrusted to him. The assignment and glory of every man is to cultivate and to protect every person and resource that God has entrusted to him. That's where men shine brightly.

That's their unique glory. There's much more to men than that because men are human beings. But for the fact that they are masculine human beings, their masculinity shines brightly in that assignment, in that role. And we gathered this by starting in Genesis chapter 2, where God creates the first man, Adam. And God gives Adam a unique assignment. We read in Genesis chapter 2, verse 15, the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. To work it and keep it. And that was the basis for all that we worked from in that sermon. Now at this point in the story, if you read through Genesis chapters 2 and 3, you discover that at this point in the story, God has not yet created the woman. She is not around to receive that assignment. In fact, if you are not a careful reader, if you are not a careful reader of the book of Genesis, you might come to a wrong conclusion. You might come to the wrong conclusion that the woman is viewed as less valuable than the man, as worth less than the man. Now how might you come to that wrong conclusion? Well, not only is the woman created only after the assignment is given, but the man who gives names to the animals also gives names and titles to her. In chapter 2, verse 23, he identifies her as woman.

Chapter 3, verse 20, he gives her the name Eve. Now naming someone in ancient cultures and in our own as well, that is an act of authority. And then finally, when the Lord confronts Adam and Eve for rebelling against him in chapter 3, verse 9, he speaks to Adam, not to the woman. He poses the question, where are you? He talks to Adam first, not to Eve. A modern reader might read that and draw a wrong conclusion. They might read that and assume from all this, because we're looking at it through the spectacles, through the lens of our own culture that understands authority wrongly, that understands value wrongly. A modern reader might assume from all this that the man is not only being portrayed as an authority over his wife, but therefore he is more valuable. He's therefore more valuable. God does not think that way. That is not the way that God our Father thinks. He doesn't think our ways any more than he thought in the ways that the ancient people did. God's ways are higher than our ways. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. His word stands astride, not only our culture, but the ancient cultures as well, and the way that they denigrated women. Yes, the man is created first. The man exercises authority over his wife.

That's the way that God clearly intended it to be in those in chapters two and three. But we also see in Genesis that the woman is every bit the man's equal in value, in worth, in dignity. And we see this because when the man sees the woman that God made, he sees her for the first time. God fashions her out of his rib and he looks at her for the first time and he recognizes at once that this woman is fundamentally different from anything else that God has made. She is fundamentally different from the animals. He says in chapter 2, verse 23, this at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.

[8 : 23] She's a human being just like him. His very flesh and bone fashioned not from the dust, but fashioned out of his own rib. The commentator Matthew Henry wrote these words about the way that God created the woman and why that's significant. The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam, not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected and near to his heart to be beloved.

And we have the words of God himself in Genesis chapter 1, verse 27, that speak of the woman's value. God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. God made both men and women, both male and female, as human beings, as the image of God, as the imago dei. That means that both men and women resemble God. Both men and women represent God. So if you are a woman, I'm speaking to half of you, that means the most important thing about you is actually not that you are female. The most important thing about you is that you are first of all an image bearer. You are an image bearer. In many cultures throughout time and space, women are treated as though they are less worthy. They are less worthy, less valuable than men, less worthy of a wage, less worthy of an education, sometimes even less worthy of a relationship with God.

That's not the way that Jesus treated women. Not at all. In Luke chapter 10, Jesus is a guest in the home of two sisters. And here's what Luke writes. Now, as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she went up to him and said, Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?

Tell her then to help me. But the Lord answered her, Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things. But one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her. Martha is doing what is expected of women in her culture. She's serving her guests.

She's being a good host. And she's trying to be the best host she can possibly be. You just know Martha is the kind of woman that when she invites people over her house is absolutely spotless, right? But Mary is simply sitting at Jesus' feet. She's listening to his teaching. And Martha doesn't think that's appropriate. Jesus is saying, Mary has chosen the good portion. When Jesus looks at Mary, he doesn't look at her as, oh, a useful domestic worker. Jesus sees the image of God. Jesus sees a woman who needs to hear his teaching about God, about who Jesus is, about what he came to do.

[11 : 44] Every woman is an image bearer first of all. If you're a woman and you want to understand more about what it means to be an image bearer, here's my book recommendation for you. A book called *Made for More, An Invitation to Live in God's Image* by Hannah Anderson. *Made for More, An Invitation to Live in God's Image* by Hannah Anderson. I actually found that's a pretty helpful book for male image bearers as well. That's a book that was very useful and helpful to me. Women are nothing less than the image of God, but they are also something more. The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, a man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. And in context, Paul is talking about a married woman. Paul is saying that such a woman is not only the image of God, she is that, and she is also the glory of her husband. Those of you who are men, you know that your wife can either be your crowning glory, or in the case of a bad marriage, your greatest shame. You know the truth of Proverbs chapter 12, verse 4. An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rotteness in his bones. Here's how Matthew Henry talks about this unique glory of a wife in relationship to her husband, how she honors her husband. He says, if man is the head, she is the crown, a crown to her husband, the crown of the visible creation. The man was dust refined, but the woman was dust double refined, one removed further from the earth. There you go, wives. That's what you can tell your husband. You might be dust refined. I am dust double refined. So women not only bear the image of God, but they bring glory to the world beyond what men alone can bring. And that's true whether or not they are wives, whether or not they are mothers. Every woman brings a unique, special glory to this world far beyond what any man can bring alone, far beyond what men can bring without women. So this brings us to the assignments and glory that God has given to every woman. And this assignment and glory, we're going to find it by looking at the reason that God gave, what the reason

God gave for creating the first woman is. Here's what God says in Genesis chapter 2, verse 18. Then the Lord God said, it is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him. After Genesis chapter 1, where God over and over and over sees that what he has created is good, is good, is good, is good. For the first time, God says it is not good. It is not good. God's rationale for creating the woman is that the man needs help. The man needs help. I know what every married woman here is thinking. He sure does. He needs a lot of help. The man is alone. He's alone. Now, we tend to look at that, and probably our first instinct when we see that word alone is we think of a relational loneliness, a sense of loneliness, right? And the emphasis really isn't on that. That's probably not how the ancient reader would have seen it. And in context, if you look at the context, the emphasis is that three verses prior, the man has been given an assignment. He's been given an assignment that we saw last week. He can't do that assignment alone. He can't do that assignment alone. The assignments and glory of every man is to cultivate and protect every person and resource that God has entrusted to him. But the man is not equipped to do this by himself. Neither is it enough, as we're about to see, that it is not enough for God to clone the man. Because that's what he could have done, right? Maybe the problem is just you need just another one just like him. You need to duplicate the man, you know?

Think about it. Maybe he's got his work that he has to do, and he just needs more people to do it. But that's not what God does. He doesn't clone the man. He doesn't create another man identical to him. He specifically says, I'll make him a helper fit for him or suitable for him. The King James Version calls the woman a help meet for him, which is where we get that phrase help meet or help mate.

You may have heard that a dog is man's best friend. The following verses show us that is not true. A dog may be a good friend, but Adam realizes that no animal is a helper fit for a man.

Adam needs a woman. Adam needs a wife to complement him. So God fashions the woman to help him carry out his God-given assignment. She is fit for him, a necessary complement. And so this leads us to the question, how does Eve help Adam? How does the woman help the man? Well, her very name, Eve, gives us a clue. In Genesis 3, verse 20, here's what we read. The man called his wife's name Eve because she was the mother of all living. Now, if you've read the translation of the Bible that our church uses, the English Standard Version, and maybe you're using a Bible translation that is a similar footnote, you've got a footnote at the end of this verse, and it says this, Eve sounds like the Hebrew for life-giver. Life-giver or life-spring. As the narrator explains, she is the mother of all living. That's what the verse says. It tells us why the name was given to her. The commentator Kenneth Matthews writes this, in the former case, he's talking about when he named her woman, he says, in the former case, he is her source of life. And by naming her woman, he acknowledges her companionship. But here, he admits his indebtedness to her for life's future.

[18:11] That's just what the Apostle Paul said, right? Just as woman was created out of man, so now man is made from woman. In other words, for Adam to carry out his assignment, Adam needs a complimentary companion who can create life. Because of the way that God has made her, Eve creates life.

Eve creates family. Eve creates a whole community of believers. Throughout the varied history, throughout the cultures of our world, there has been one constant. It has been women who create new life.

Women who create family. Women who are at the heartbeat of the community. That's true everywhere. The Bible knows nothing of a strong, independent man. The Bible knows nothing of a strong, independent woman. It knows women. Women like Ruth and Naomi from the book of Ruth.

Women whose dependence on one another, that's their strength. Their bonds. The community and the family they create. Women whose dependence on Boaz. His dependence on them. That's what brings life, hope, and in fact, a future king to Israel. And ultimately, our king, Jesus Christ, who came from that line, from that lineage. Last week, men, we saw that your assignment and glory is to cultivate and to protect every person and resource that God has entrusted to you. But you cannot do it alone.

Those of you who are married need your wives. And men, whether or not you are married, you need the women of your family and of your community, of your church, to do this assignment and shine with the unique glory of a man. You can't do this assignment. You can't shine with your unique glory as a man unless you have women alongside you. That's because the assignment and glory of every woman is to help men by creating and crafting the family and community that God has granted to her. The assignment and glory of every woman is to help men by creating and crafting the family and community that God has granted to her. The woman was created to help the man. And so women, you shine with brilliant glory. You do when you create and craft not just your biological family. You don't need to be married and to be biological mothers to make this happen. You have a community you're in and you have the true family, the truest family of our local church. To shine brightly in this assignment, you need to become a certain type of woman, just as men need to become a certain type of man.

[20 : 49] You need to develop what we may call feminine virtues, to develop the muscle memory of right thinking and actions that fit your assignment. And you need the virtues that will help you create and craft the family and community that God has granted to you. Just like the masculine virtues that we saw last week, God's word shows us how a woman can shine brightly as a woman. And one of the examples that preachers often turn to, especially on Mother's Day, is the excellent wife. What's called the excellent wife? The idealized wise woman of Proverbs 31. Already some of you are puking. On behalf of all of us preachers, so I apologize for the way this is often preached because when I often see this preached, it ends up being this guilt trip. It's a guilt trip because you have this list of all these amazing things that this woman is doing. And so then women hear about this woman. They feel terrible for not measuring up. Women, I know so many of you who just beat yourself up for not measuring up to your idealized standard of what a woman should be or for not measuring up to what culture expects of you or not measuring up to the photos on Facebook and Instagram of the perfect family.

Not many of you are doing what the Proverbs, all the things that the Proverbs 31 woman is said to be doing. Spinning wool and flax, importing food, serving food at the crack of dawn, engaging in real estate transactions, launching a vineyard business, building awesome arm muscles, staying up late to calculate profits, weaving and selling garments and bedsheets, giving to the poor, offering sage advice all around, working super hard all the time. If you are doing all those things, you are listening to this sermon from a trauma recovery ward. The point of Proverbs 31 is this. It's simply this.

First of all, for young men, it's to portray what to look for in an excellent wife. To get young men off this idea that what they really need is a woman who is, you know, who is drop-dead gorgeous, smoking hot, and super charming and flirty. To say, hey, it's a woman who fears the Lord. That's what you're looking for. Young men are really dumb when it comes to choosing women.

And so they need Proverbs 31. Proverbs 31, for married men, is in fact the only commandment in that chapter is given to married men, to praise their wives, to give them the fruit of their hands, to praise their wives, to reward them, to care for them, to brag about them to all their friends. And Proverbs 31 is to show women that you can shine with glory. It tells young men that a woman who shines with glory is a woman who helps him by creating and crafting a family and community that God has granted to her.

1 Timothy chapter 5, the Apostle Paul paints another picture of feminine virtues as he describes the widows in the church of Ephesus. Widows that he says should be financially supported. Women that the church should organize around and support. And he says, let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than 60 years of age, having been the wife of one husband and having a reputation for good works.

[24 : 10] If she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work. This is a woman who displays the virtues of nurturing, of hospitality, of tender care.

Now just like the woman of Proverbs 31, this is an idealized woman. If you're looking for a real flesh and blood example of feminine virtue, you'll find many in scripture. We saw, we mentioned Ruth and Naomi as terrific examples in the Old Testament. We saw Mary who sat at Jesus' feet and learned from him. One of the most interesting examples, and I'm going to pick this for an interesting reason, one of the most interesting examples of feminine virtue is not a woman at all, it is a man. It's the Apostle Paul himself. Here's what Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 to a church that he founded.

We were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

Paul says that he and his fellow church planters, his team, they were gentle, they were tender, affectionate, nurturing, self-giving, just like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.

The reason I picked this example of feminine virtues is to make an important point. You know what makes macho men and male chauvinists complete fools? You know what makes them complete fools? They think that feminine virtues are for women only. They think that men, you know, you shouldn't be gentle and tender, affectionate, self-giving, nurturing, hospitable, caring. Man like that is no man at all. Nothing could be further from the truth. Men may shine brightly as they display the masculine virtues, but they need to develop feminine virtues as well. That's because our most perfect picture, you know who the most perfect picture of feminine virtues is in Scripture? It's actually a man. It's actually Jesus Christ. Last week we saw Jesus speak of his masculine virtues in John chapter 17. This week we find in John chapter 14 that Jesus is displaying perfect feminine virtues as well.

[26 : 34] Not only does Jesus wash the feet of his disciples in the previous chapter, but look at the way, look at the way that Jesus helps his disciples when he says, whatever you ask in my name, this I will do that the father may be glorified in the son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. And I will ask the father and he will give you another helper to be with you forever. Even the spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him for he dwells with you and will be in you. Jesus is caring for his disciples on the eve of his own crucifixion as they are feeling confused and afraid and he's caring for them. He's helping them. He's speaking compassionately to their insecurity and to their worries. And he promises to welcome them into the community of God's family, to welcome them into a place of oneness when he says, I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my father and you in me and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my father and I will love him and manifest myself to him.

And Jesus promises not only to create a family, a community, to give them life, but he is creating and crafting a home in heaven for them. He says, in my father's house are many rooms.

If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself and that where I am, you may be also.

Do you see the tenderness, the affection of Jesus Christ? Do you see his gentleness and compassion? Is he not beautiful?

If you learn nothing else, if you forget everything else from last week and from this week, learn this, that Jesus Christ is absolutely perfect. Jesus is perfect and wonderful in his strength and courage, perfect and wonderful in his tenderness and compassion. You can't make up a man like this.

[29 : 09] You cannot make up Jesus Christ. He's the only perfect human being, the only son of God. Women, you know, so many of you know, you haven't lived up to God's assignment for you.

You know all too well that you've fallen short of the glory of God. You failed as his image bearer. You failed as a woman. But where you failed, Jesus has succeeded in being the perfect image bearer and being perfect in virtue. Because Jesus died in your place. Because Jesus took your sin and your failure and Jesus paid for it all. Every last bit of it on the cross. If you believe in Jesus Christ, your faith is in him, then you are forgiven. You are free. And you are freed from the crushing expectations of our culture. Our culture expects so much of women. Crushes the life out of them.

And you are freed to shine as a woman, helping to create and craft the family and community of God. If you believe in Christ, you have been made alive in Christ. And through the power of the Holy Spirit, you can shine. And so if you are a woman, you are no longer a slave to the behaviors that corrupt many of your fellow women. You're no longer, you know, we see in scripture examples of ways women tend to be corrupted. Their feminine virtues are corrupted. You're no longer willingly deceived and manipulative like Eve. You're no longer to be gossips and busybodies like the kind of widows that Paul warns against in 1 Timothy chapter 5. You're no longer to be quarrelsome like the nagging wife the book of Proverbs warns about repeatedly. You can be set free. You can be set free from all of that. You can free, be free to embrace your assignment, free to find your true glory as a woman. And so the assignment and glory of every woman is to help men by creating and crafting the family and community that God has granted to her. Now, once again, just like the man, it would be super helpful to get into a lot of specifics. How do you do that in all of the real world relationships in your life?

That's like five more sermons. And so the good news is as we begin our sermon series on the book of Ephesians, once we hit chapters 4 and 5 of Ephesians, just like with men, women will have the opportunity to learn how can we flourish in the relationships in our lives. Think through those relationships. Maybe you're a wife or a mother or a daughter or a sister or a neighbor, a colleague, a supervisor. How can you craft the family and community, strengthen the bonds, even encourage the men in your life to carry out their assignment? How can you create community, forming new bonds, giving new life to the people around you? Do you have time to devote to other people, to care for them and help them? Do you have talents and spiritual gifts that you can use in creative ways to nurture and to develop and to show kindness to your family and church and community?

Time, talents, treasures. Do you have treasures or possessions that you can generously contribute to the needs of others? If you're part of a growth group, just like with the men, just like last week, if you're part of a growth group, I would strongly recommend discuss these things this week.

[32 : 40] Talk about specifics. How can you do these things in these specific relationships in your life? How can you help the men who are part of your family and community, help them to cultivate and protect the people and resources that God has entrusted to them?

You were designed for glory and you shine brightly in your God-given assignment. But above all, remember the words that Jesus spoke to Martha. Martha thought she was being a dutiful and faithful woman because she was doing all this work. She was serving. She was helping.

But Jesus told her that what Mary was doing was even better. In fact, Mary was doing the one thing that was necessary. Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet. Mary was listening to him teaching. Mary was watching him and learning to be like him. And so Jesus told Martha, Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her. So women, if you come to know Jesus Christ, if you come to see him for who he is, if you come to consider his words, mull over his teaching, you will be changed. You will be transformed by the Holy Spirit. You will find power from the Holy Spirit to carry out your assignment. Your assignment and glory is to help men by creating and crafting the family and community that God has granted to you. And as you see Jesus for who he is, you will find, you shine brightly with his glory. You become like him as you behold him.

And there's a good life there, the good portion. And that good life that comes from knowing him will never, never be taken away from you.