



## **Raising the Value of Children Created in God's Image**

Written by Abigail Velazquez

'So God created humankind; in his image, in the image of God he created them male and female he created them.' Genesis 1:27

'When God created humankind, he made them in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them 'Humankind' when they were created.' Genesis 5:1b-2

When my son was born, my husband and I obsessed over his features and debated whom he most resembled. Fascinated by this tiny creature, we pored over our own baby pictures, assigning his thin lips and thick coal black hair to mine, his brown eyes and long, lean figure to my husband. But we were stumped by his round nose and seemingly large ears for a newborn, features that didn't fit with our narrow noses and small ears. He is now two-and-a-half, and while his features have become his own, we still puzzle over the nose and ears, scrutinizing photos of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, trying to figure out who they resemble.

Human beings are the magnum opus of God's creation as rendered in Genesis 1 and 2. We read in Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 5:1b-2 that humankind was created in God's image and likeness. Theologians, much like my husband and I obsessing over our son's traits, have obsessed and disagreed over what created in God's image means for human beings. Some say we human beings are created in God's image because of our ability to be rational. We are able to make choices and decisions, weighing the outcome and advantages. Others say it has to do with being relational, as we are able to forge bonds with other human beings, whether it is through a lasting relationship or small chat with a stranger on the street. Perhaps it is a physical likeness, and we humans actually look like God (maybe that's where my son's nose came from!). Or it could be our emotional capacity, the fact that we can experience a range of emotions at any given moment. Some say it is a spiritual likeness, and because God is Spirit, we are drawn to God because we are spiritual beings.

Due to the disagreements regarding what image and likeness could mean, children are left out of the equation because they are not mature adult human beings who have developed fully in these areas. Their decisions are rash and are evidence of an inability to think through consequences. Children cannot control their emotions and do not hold back their anger, frustration, or fear. Furthermore, Genesis 2 describes the creation of two adult human beings rather than the natural biological process of birth and human

development. Surely God does not look like a toddler or even an elementary aged student. These conclusions, while often drawn unconsciously, lead us to forgetting children when we speak of humans bearing the whole image and likeness of God. Children are viewed as “less-than” in the sense that they are denied the capability of thinking rationally, expressing emotions accurately, and developing spiritually. Being in the image and likeness of God, traditionally, is only granted to adults. Furthermore, this is perpetuated by the fact that, while the Bible has much to say in regards to children, it says nothing explicitly about children themselves being created in God’s image.

This conclusion seems absurd and ridiculous because, of course, we affirm that children are created in God’s image! We fight, and fight hard, for children’s rights in the home, school, and church, but with the unconscious thought that they will not reach their full potential as physical and spiritual beings until adulthood. This belief hinders the way we think about children and value their full personhood as created wholly in God’s image, and it is often reflected in our ministries that seek to keep children quiet in the background so that the adults can adequately focus on worshiping God and be spiritually nourished.

So how do we begin to embrace an understanding that all humanity, from conception on, bears the image of God? Author, theologian, and advocate for the voice of children in the church Marcia Bunge offers a way in which we can broaden our understanding of children as created in God’s image. She writes that we must view children “...as developing creatures in need of instruction, yet as fully human beings made in the image of God; as sinful beings and symbols of immature faith, yet as vehicles of revelation and models of faith; as gifts of God and sources of joy, yet as orphans and strangers in need of justice and compassion.”<sup>1</sup>

Just as I am unsure as to whether my husband and I will ever solve the mystery of whose nose and ears our son bears, I don’t think we’ll ever solve the mystery of what it truly means to be created in God’s image and bear God’s likeness. Nonetheless, my husband and I accept our son as in our likeness and we are moved deeply when we see the best of ourselves in his features, actions, and personality. So let us all take time to see God’s image that every child bears, rejoicing when we see the divine imprint each child is marked with as they love unconditionally, forgive without reservation, and show great compassion towards us as we journey together to raise the value of the children in our midst.

## **LET’S RAISE THE VALUE OF CHILDREN!**

You don’t have to be a pastor, children’s minister, or even a parent; ANYONE can raise the value of children.

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<sup>1</sup> Marcia Bunge, “Children, the Image of God, and Christology: Theological Anthropology in Solidarity with children.” in *Who is Jesus Christ for Us Today: Pathways to Contemporary Christology*. Andreas Schuele, Thomas Gunter, eds. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.  
1. New Revised Standard Version, Abingdon Press: Nashville, 2003.

- Develop the mindset: “What I do matters to this generation.” Believe that your actions will make a difference.
- Learn and use the names of the children in your neighborhood and in your local church.
- Meet the needs of a child. Pay for sports registration fees, purchase a book bag and school supplies, or pay camp tuition fees and provide camp spending money.
- Get involved in a child’s life. Remember a birthday. Attend a child’s sporting event, concert, school awards ceremony, etc.
- Support decisions made in your local church that will bless children i.e. funding for children’s ministry programs, facilities, and staffing.
- Attend and participate in children’s ministry activities at your local church.
- Embrace “outliers”—children and families that are not in the mainstream of the local church. Focus on families and children who are in crisis from loss of employment, extended illness, divorce, addiction, etc. Focus on families who are not part of the church culture i.e. they come because their children attend but have no personal connections.