Bite Size Bible Study 50

By Lee Logue

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, in the likeness of ourselves; and let them rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the animals, and over all the earth, and over every crawling creature that crawls on the earth." So God created humankind in his own image; in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:26-27 CJB

So what does it mean that we were made "in the image of God"? The root word is *tzelem* meaning image, idol, statue or shadowy form. To an ancient person, a god's "image" was its physical representation on earth. Idols were the images of the gods, as well as physical objects of worship like the sun and moon. Kings were often said to be the "images" of gods - they were the representatives of a god on earth, with the belief that the gods reigned over their people through the king's commands.

If we believe that we all have God's image within us, shouldn't that impact the way we live?

One rabbinic commentary on Genesis answers this question with the following fictional story:

> When creation was all but ended, only humanity was left to be created. God began to say, 'Let us make man in our likeness,' but some protests arose in heaven!
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> First *Truth* came and fell before God's throne, and in humility exclaimed, "Please, O God, do not call into being a creature who is beset with the vice of lying, who will tread truth under his feet!"
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> *Peace* also agreed, and said, "Why, O Lord, shall this creature appear on earth, a creature so full of strife and contention, to disturb the peace and harmony of your creation? He will carry the flame of quarrel and ill-will in his trail; he will bring about war and destruction in his eagerness for gain and conquest."
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> While they were pleading against the creation of man, another voice was heard, the soft voice of *Mercy*.
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> "King of the universe," the voice exclaimed in all its mildness, "if you create a being *in your likeness*, it will be a noble creature striving to imitate your attributes by its actions. I see man now with God's breath in his nostrils, seeking to perform his great mission, to do his noble work. I see him approaching the humble hut, seeking out those who are distressed and wretched, to comfort them, drying the tears of the afflicted and despondent, raising up them that are bowed down in spirit, reaching his helping hand to those who are in need of help, speaking peace to the heart of the widow, and giving shelter to the fatherless. Such a creature cannot fail to be a glory to his maker.'
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> The Creator approved of the pleadings of *Mercy*, and called man into being.

This rabbinic story shows that when humans show the kindness and compassion of our creator, then we reach our true potential as his creation by reflecting (shadowing) his image on earth. It points out man's potential for good, even while acknowledging man's potential for evil.

Jesus was the only person who truly lived up to His potential, because He completely reflected the image of God without succumbing to evil. Because he is the Son of God, he reflects the character and nature of God in a way unparalleled by any mere man. Through his life here on earth, God's sacrificial love and desire to forgive was revealed. Never before had a human being portrayed God's character so exactly. Jesus then set the standard to live by. By trying to live as much like His life and the character He portrayed, we achieve our true potential in reflecting the **image and glory of God**.

Being in the "Image of God" is not about looking like Him, after all we do not see Him as a physical being as we are.

Of the meanings of the Hebrew word *tzelem* (image, idol, statue or shadowy form), I think that the term shadowy form fits best with what we are to be.

A shadow, while not complete, represents the true object.

The shadow we throw should represent God's character, mercy, and compassion.

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