

SHAPE: Your Gifts for God's Good Purposes

Introduction to the SHAPE series

Every one of us has been created by God as a unique person. Each of us have a unique set of gifts, passions, abilities, personalities, and life experiences. And each of these five features factor into the way you and I are called to serve God and his purposes in the world. We have borrowed the helpful acronym "SHAPE" from Rick Warren's book *The Purpose Driven Life*, as I believe it reflects well the many dimensions of our personhood.

Over the next six weeks we'll explore each of these in more details as part of our yearly Values Study – a long tradition where we read a gift book, or work through a particular set of studies designed to help us more deeply embrace one of our five core values on a rotating basis. These include worship, sharing the news of Jesus (evangelism), fellowship, spiritual growth, and – this year's focus – ministering in our gifts. We hope that you will take these next weeks to genuinely explore what it means to use your God-given gifts for God's glory. Our hope is that everyone who is able could be involved in one of our LifeGroups. We believe that God designed us to help each to know God more truly, change deeply, and win the world within community.

With anticipation for all the ways God will be growing us through this season,

– Pastor Dave and the staff team

Part One: God's Good Idea

"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well."

– Psalm 139:13-14

The Psalm writer is talking about... *himself*. He's saying: "I am God's good idea. Fearfully and wonderfully made..." And you and I, need to say that same thing as the Psalmist. You are God's good idea.

Our Current Cultural Situation

If you ask anyone organization that works with volunteers about the impact of Covid – in any sector – they will say it's meant a remarkable downturn in people saying, "Yup, I'll help. Sign me up!" Why? Probably lots of factors, but an obvious one is just this: habits form and they die hard.

Certainly, at different seasons in our lives we will likely need to re-evaluate how these five elements are at play in the ways we give ourselves to God's purposes. This series will help each of us do that.

I. Being God's Image

"Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, **so that** they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." – Genesis 1:26

To be made in God's image is *for* something. It's a task. A job description: to rule over – a word that suggests caring for and managing – the rest of the created world. The man and woman are said to be "God's image," and together they embody and represent the Creator within his creation.

"So God created the humans in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." – Genesis 1:27-28

"More than anything else...subduing and ruling gives people the mission of bringing order to their world just as God has brought order to the cosmos." – John Walton

Bringing order to our world. We are "like God" – imaging him – in that regard.

The creation of humanity here is intended to show how we are royal representatives of God and God's purposes within his creation. And the rest of the story is about God reclaiming humanity, so we can rule with God forever.

Creation Reclaimed as the Goal

The last chapter of the Bible bring us right back to this opening scene. In Revelation 22 we find that the "tree of life" – which is described in Genesis 2 – is right in the centre of the renewed heavens and earth. But instead of a garden, it's a city.

"The throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads....And they will reign for ever and ever."

– Revelation 22:4-5

Adam and Eve are being presented as "priests" of creation and prototypes for the human vocation, or "calling." We were made to serve God and rule with him.

When God speaks to his people in Exodus 19:6, after he rescues them from slavery in Egypt we see this same language or rules and "priesthood" that extends to the whole community:

"Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

– Exodus 19:6

II. Renewed in the Image of our Creator

“Do not lie to each other, since you have **taken off your old self** with its practices and have **put on the new self**, which is **being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.**”

– Colossians 3:9-10

Paul is working from the Genesis story to show us how God is putting his world back together, with a community of people who are now living from a place of “renewal” – a work of God that pulls us back in line with God’s original purposes for us.

This “renewal project,” it **begins** with the transfer for our allegiance and our whole lives into God’s kingdom:

“For he [God the Father] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

– Colossians 1:13-14

Through Jesus we are becoming the person God always intended.

“...one’s true self, one’s full humanity...emerges once the shackles of the old humanity are thrown off....At last, in Christ, human beings can be what God intended them to be.”

– N.T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*

III. Renewed to be just like Jesus - A Servant

How does Jesus, the one who both shows us what God is like and how to be fully human, fully alive (see Romans 5), order his life?

Jesus says this to his disciples who are arguing over who among them is the greatest:

“...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” – Mark 10:43b-45

So, here’s the posture of the True Human – that we are to “image” in our approach to life. He comes to serve, and in an incredibly costly way.

“Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.” – John 13:3-5

There is no other place on record in all of antiquity of a superior washing the feet of an inferior. Jesus lowers himself. The God of the whole universe washes feet. And then after he finishes washing their feet, look what Jesus says to them – to us:

“¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶ Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

– John 13:14-17

Want to know God’s blessing? Take on this same posture in your relationships with each other.

You are God’s good idea. You are *fearfully and wonderfully made*. You have been created with a beautiful task of ruling alongside of God, and you have been renewed in that image through Jesus’ finished work.

And we together, the whole people of God, are called into this mission together. As Paul says: “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” – Ephesians 2:10

What will that look like for you? What is it that God is calling you to this year: In your home; in your workplace; and in the marketplace as well as within our church family?

Irenaeus was a second century pastor and theologian who has this famous saying: “The glory of God is a human being fully alive.” – Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses (Against Heresy)*

Nothing else in all of creation honours God more than a human being, being totally alive to God and his purposes through Jesus.

You are God’s good idea, and he is glorified, he is honoured, as you and I come alive to him through Jesus in the power of the Spirit. Our whole lives become this beautiful offering to God. A “thank you for your love and goodness.”

Life Group Discussion and Reflection:

Open Up

Think of someone who has made a significant, positive difference in your life – maybe a teacher, a Christian leader, a parent, a friend, a co-worker. Share with the group one or two of the traits they displayed that made them such a positive person.

Dig In

1. In the message we looked at how being made in the image of God is not just about human dignity and worth (though that is true), or about our relational nature (which is also true), but it has a purpose clause “so that they may rule...” The image of God in Genesis 1:26-28 is a task – a job description. It tells us that we partner with God in the task of bringing order out of chaos. We also saw that “Creation-Reloaded” is the final picture we are given in Scripture; that God’s ultimate goal is his creation restored, and saved humanity serving him and ruling with him (Revelation 22).

- a. How does this fact give value and worth to all human endeavors right now (homemaking, working in construction, parenting, managing a business, serving in healthcare or education, working as a cleaner, cooking)?
- b. How might it change how you see the significance of your weekly work, whether it’s serving in the home, the marketplace, or the church?

2. Look at **Psalm 139:13-18**.

- a. Notice v.14. What “works” that are “wonderful” does the Psalmist have in mind?
- b. How would your view of yourself shift if you came to believe, with the Psalmist, that you really were “God’s good idea”?

3. Read **Ephesians 2:10**.

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” – Ephesians 2:10

- a. Do you have a good sense of how God may be shaping you to play your part in his “good works”? What ways might that be?
- b. If not, what excites you about our journey of discovering that more?

Pray

Take some time to thank God that you are fearfully and wonderfully made – that you are God’s good idea. Pray for any needs that the group has. Pray that each person would be open to discovering, more and more, the ways God has created them to serve in the way Jesus is calling them to.