




June 13, 2021
Sermon Series:
Eight Encouraging Words from God

You Are Created in God's Image
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Psalm 8 NRSV

- ¹ O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
- ² Out of the mouths of babes and infants
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.
- ³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
- ⁴ what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals^[a] that you care for them?
- ⁵ Yet you have made them a little lower than God,^[b]
and crowned them with glory and honor.
- ⁶ You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,
- ⁷ all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
- ⁸ the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
- ⁹ O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!



One of the fundamental tenets of scripture is that we are created in the image of God. It's known as Imago Dei. Comes straight from Genesis 1: "In God's image they were created, male and female God created them." It's a broad, generous, expansive description that has room for people of every body type and gender expression and skin color and age and ability. Room for freckles and birthmarks and wrinkles.



Like Jen just said in Story Time: You bear the image of God and it is beautiful.

But that image is more than skin deep. It goes past the surface and permeates us from the inside out. It shows up in the way we think and reason, the way we move and function. So if you are good at math or can sing like an angel or have a quick wit, that's the image of God. And if you are sometimes filled to the brim with feelings you can't control, that's the image of God. And if you have an unsteady gait or an occasional 'senior moment' or a pancreas that needs a little help regulating, that's the image of God, too.


This is such a foundational interpretation that we could stop this sermon right there. Because that message that you are created in the image of God runs counter to our photoshopped, instagrammed world. It can be hard enough for ordinary, confident, well-adjusted people to believe. If you have body dysmorphia or low self-esteem or chronic pain, it can be darn near impossible. So let me say it again: You bear the image of God and it is beautiful.

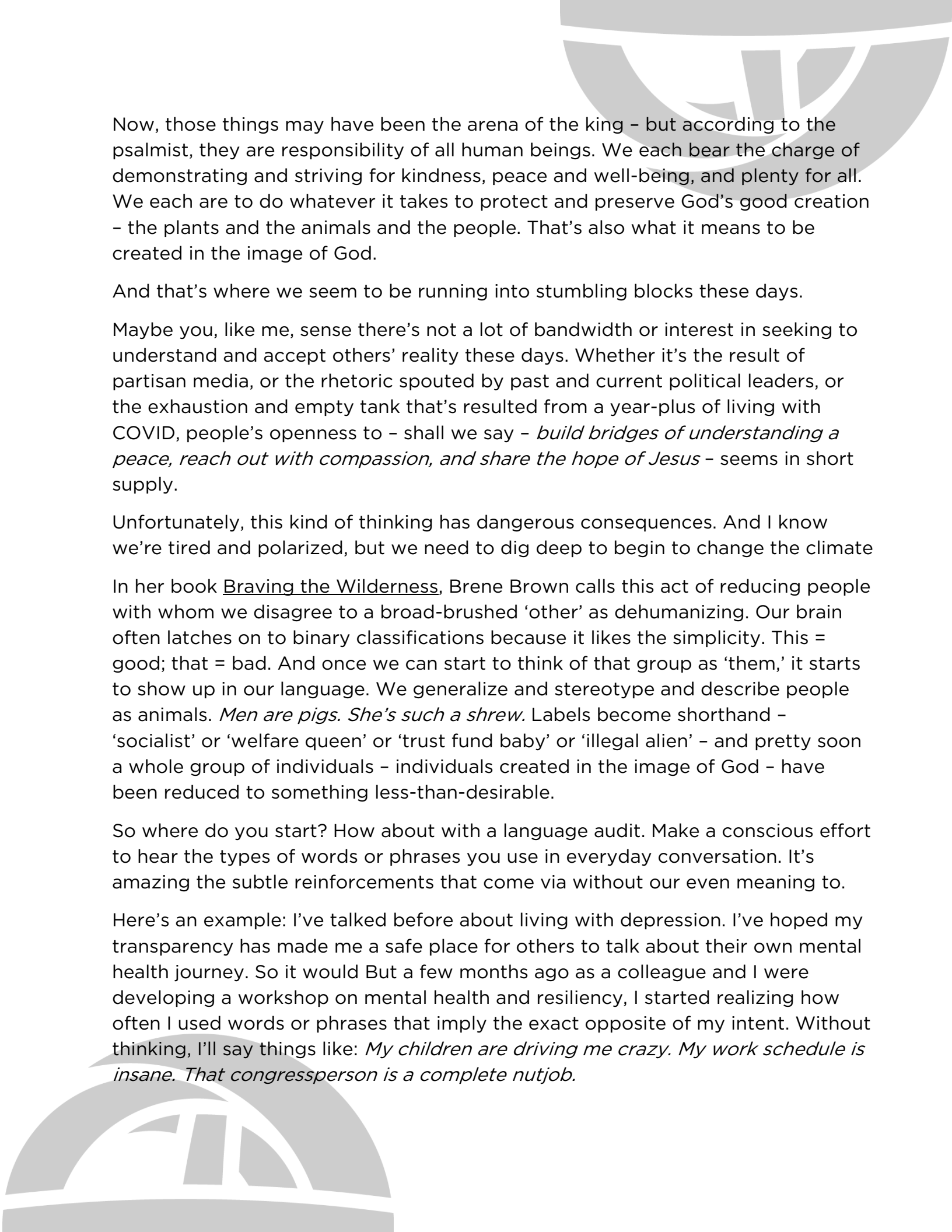
But this message isn't where scripture stops. In fact, Psalm 8 expands this idea that being created in God's image isn't just accepting yourself as worthy and wonderfully made. It means seeing others through that same lens.

It sounds like the psalmist is having a bit of an existential crisis, feeling like a tiny speck in the midst of the cosmos. He isn't questioning God's providence. But he might be having doubts about the meaning of life. The world is so vast; the problems so weighty. People are fragile and flawed. It can be hard to feel marked by God's fingerprints. But then the psalmist not only affirms that God has created human beings 'just a little lower than the angels;' God has also given them a particular role as caretakers of creation.

There's this word in the psalm that clues us in to that: *mashal*. It's often translated as dominion, and it's most often used in the Hebrew Bible to describe the rule of the king over the people.

Professor Nancy deClaisse-Walford writes that God's ideal for a monarch's rule was not that of absolute and arbitrary dictatorial power. In ancient society, it was the king's primary responsibility "to provide a place where people could live in peace and safety, raise their animals and their crops, be treated with justice and equity, and be cared for if they were unable to care for themselves." In other words, to demonstrate and strive for "kindness, peace and well-being, and plenty for all."





Now, those things may have been the arena of the king – but according to the psalmist, they are responsibility of all human beings. We each bear the charge of demonstrating and striving for kindness, peace and well-being, and plenty for all. We each are to do whatever it takes to protect and preserve God’s good creation – the plants and the animals and the people. That’s also what it means to be created in the image of God.

And that’s where we seem to be running into stumbling blocks these days.

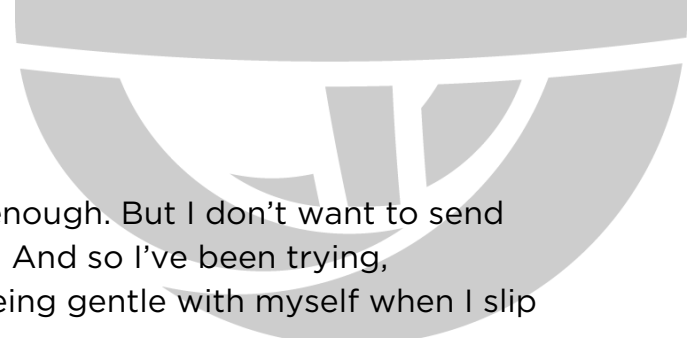
Maybe you, like me, sense there’s not a lot of bandwidth or interest in seeking to understand and accept others’ reality these days. Whether it’s the result of partisan media, or the rhetoric spouted by past and current political leaders, or the exhaustion and empty tank that’s resulted from a year-plus of living with COVID, people’s openness to – shall we say – *build bridges of understanding a peace, reach out with compassion, and share the hope of Jesus* – seems in short supply.

Unfortunately, this kind of thinking has dangerous consequences. And I know we’re tired and polarized, but we need to dig deep to begin to change the climate

In her book [Braving the Wilderness](#), Brene Brown calls this act of reducing people with whom we disagree to a broad-brushed ‘other’ as dehumanizing. Our brain often latches on to binary classifications because it likes the simplicity. This = good; that = bad. And once we can start to think of that group as ‘them,’ it starts to show up in our language. We generalize and stereotype and describe people as animals. *Men are pigs. She’s such a shrew.* Labels become shorthand – ‘socialist’ or ‘welfare queen’ or ‘trust fund baby’ or ‘illegal alien’ – and pretty soon a whole group of individuals – individuals created in the image of God – have been reduced to something less-than-desirable.

So where do you start? How about with a language audit. Make a conscious effort to hear the types of words or phrases you use in everyday conversation. It’s amazing the subtle reinforcements that come via without our even meaning to.

Here’s an example: I’ve talked before about living with depression. I’ve hoped my transparency has made me a safe place for others to talk about their own mental health journey. So it would But a few months ago as a colleague and I were developing a workshop on mental health and resiliency, I started realizing how often I used words or phrases that imply the exact opposite of my intent. Without thinking, I’ll say things like: *My children are driving me crazy. My work schedule is insane. That congressperson is a complete nutjob.*



See what I mean? They're certainly innocuous enough. But I don't want to send signals that I don't take mental health seriously. And so I've been trying, consciously, to change my language, and I'm being gentle with myself when I slip up.

This effort to rehumanize others by paying attention to our language might seem small, but it's not.

In [Michael Gerson's column in Thursday's Washington Post](#), he put it like this:

During every generation across two millennia, Christians have faced the question: Do they oppose and confront the worst elements of their culture, or do they reflect and amplify them?

In our time — and in just about every time — the most dangerous human failure is the dehumanization of others. To justify our callousness and cruelty, we tend to diminish the value and dignity of their object. It is dehumanization that results in racism. It is dehumanization that leads to sexual abuse and exploitation. It is dehumanization that breaks the bonds between citizens and turns disagreement into hatred and violence.

People of faith are not the only source of humanizing morality in our society. But they are called to stand for the idea that every human being is created equally valuable in the image of God.

Please hear me: believing all people are created in the image of God does not mean nodding politely and moving on when there are wrongs to be righted. In the face of injustice we are called to speak boldly. Indeed, that's an elemental part of the *mashal* of the king. Until there is peace and well-being and plenty for all, any kindness we practice to our peers will always ring hollow.

But that kindness does help us more fully bear God's image. It shows the face and grace of our Lord Jesus. And we bear God's image when we treat people as individuals, not labels. When we preserve their dignity instead of dehumanize them. When we accept that other peoples' opinions and experiences are valid even if they do not match our own. When we ascribe positive intent and extend grace upon grace because we're all doing the best we can.

Friends, we do this because we belong to Jesus. His deep and expansive love for us shows us the way. And it reminds that we bear his image to the world — and it is beautiful. Amen.

