

A DEVOTIONAL THOUGHT

Identity Received

R — RELATIONAL: Humanity, Gender, and Family

Genesis 1:27 • Psalm 139:13–14 • Deuteronomy 6:6–7

ANCHOR VERSE

"So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. — Genesis 1:27"

"Who am I in relation to others?"

R — RELATIONAL | Humanity • Gender & Sexuality • Family

The Awakening

There is no more contested territory in contemporary culture than the questions this dimension of FRAME addresses: What is a human being? Is gender fixed or fluid? What constitutes a family? These are not peripheral debates. They go to the heart of identity — who we are, where we come from, what we are for, and to whom we belong.

The Relational dimension of FRAME addresses these questions not by reacting to the culture's answers but by returning to the Creator's. Because God is relational within Himself — Father, Son, and Spirit in eternal community — the beings He created in His image are relational by design. Identity is not self-constructed; it is received. Community is not optional; it is the context in which image-bearing is expressed and faith is transmitted.

Babylon understood the power of identity. Before doing anything else to Daniel and his friends, Nebuchadnezzar changed their names. He renamed Daniel 'Belteshazzar,' Hananiah 'Shadrach,' Mishael 'Meshach,' and Azariah 'Abednego' — replacing Hebrew names that referenced the God of Israel with Babylonian names that referenced Babylonian gods. The strategy was identity replacement: if you can rename someone, you can reorient them. What Babylon attempted with Daniel, the contemporary culture attempts with every believer. The question is whether our identity is deep enough and grounded enough that the renaming fails.

The Foundational Text: Genesis 1:26–28

"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.' So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." — Genesis 1:26–27

Three dimensions of identity are established in these two verses — and they correspond precisely to the three sub-categories of the Relational FRAME dimension: humanity (created in God's image), gender (male and female He created them), and purpose within community (so that they may rule — the dominion mandate given to image-bearers in covenant relationship with God and one another).

Notice the grammar: 'Let us make' — plurality within God's own being — followed by 'in our image' — the image of a relational God. Human beings are not made in the image of a solitary, self-contained deity. They are made in the image of a God who is, within Himself, a community of persons. Relationship is not something we choose to add to our identity. It is constitutive of the image we bear.

What the Text Reveals

Humanity — The Imago Dei and Its Consequences

Imago Dei — the image of God — is the most radical claim in the history of human thought about human beings. In the ancient world, kings bore the image of the gods. The idea that every human being — from the slave to the pharaoh, from the infant to the elder, from the brilliant to the cognitively impaired — bears the image of the divine Creator was genuinely revolutionary. It is the idea that drove the abolition of slavery, the founding of universal education, the invention of systematic charity, and the foundation of human rights.

But the Imago Dei carries two truths simultaneously, and both must be held together: radical dignity and radical fallenness. Human beings are not simply sick; they are fallen. Jeremiah 17:9 is unsparing: 'The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?' Romans 3:23 is equally clear: 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.' The image is marred — not erased, but marred. This is why the world is simultaneously capable of breathtaking beauty and horrifying cruelty. Both flow from the same creature: made in God's image, fallen from God's design.

The pastoral implication is enormous. The Relational dimension does not allow us to treat human beings as essentially good, requiring only education and environment to flourish — nor does it allow us to treat them as worthless or irredeemable. God does not restore what has no value. The very existence of the gospel is evidence that human beings are worth redeeming. 'He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy' (Titus 3:5) — but the mercy would mean nothing if there were no dignity in the ones being saved.

This also shapes how we approach other people — especially those whose lives or choices we find difficult. Daniel served under kings who burned people alive and threw servants to lions. He never treated them as subhuman. He maintained the conviction that even the pagan emperor bore something of the divine image — which is why he could serve with excellence, speak truth with respect, and pray for kings he disagreed with. The Imago Dei does not disappear because a person is powerful, broken, lost, or hostile. It is the basis on which we engage everyone.

Gender and Sexuality — Design Before Definition

'Male and female he created them.' This four-word phrase from Genesis 1:27 is the most compressed and most contested statement in contemporary cultural debate. The biblical position is not that gender is one of many socially negotiated identities — it is that gender is a design feature of creation, established by God before any culture existed to offer an alternative definition.

Jesus affirmed this explicitly. When the Pharisees asked about divorce, He did not appeal to Mosaic law as his first reference. He went back to creation: 'Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female?' (Matt 19:4). The creation order — not cultural convention, not personal preference, not psychological experience — is the standard. Jesus treated Genesis 1 and 2 as normative history, not negotiable narrative.

Sexuality in the biblical framework is not the suppression of a gift but the ordering of one. Sexual expression is a gift from God, created good, designed for flourishing — but designed specifically for the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman. This is not an arbitrary restriction. It is a design specification, like the load-bearing capacity of a bridge. A bridge is not 'freed' by removing weight limits; it is endangered. Sexuality is not 'freed' by removing creational boundaries; it is disordered.

This conviction is increasingly costly to hold publicly. Daniel's three friends understood costly conviction: 'The God we serve is able to deliver us, but even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up' (Dan 3:17–18). The conviction about gender and sexuality is not held because it is easy or popular. It is held because it is true — because the Creator's design for His creatures is better than any human redefinition, and because faithfulness to that design is a witness that the world needs, even if it does not want it.

Family — The First Classroom

The family is not a social institution that human civilization invented and that can be reinvented as circumstances change. It is a divinely ordained structure — husband and wife in covenant, children bearing the image of God, generations transmitting faith — that precedes every culture and outlasts every empire.

'Impress these commandments on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up' (Deut 6:7). The instruction is not Sunday school twice a month. It is pervasive, conversational, daily, seasonal worldview formation happening in the ordinary rhythms of family life. The family is the first classroom of every human being. What is taught there — explicitly and implicitly, by words and by example — forms the worldview through which everything else is interpreted for the rest of life.

Daniel's covenant community with his three friends is worth noting here. In exile, separated from their biological families, these four young men formed a covenant community that functioned as family: they prayed together (Dan 2:17–18), they encouraged one another in conscience (Dan 1:11–16), and they stood together when the empire pressed hardest. The family structure the Bible describes extends beyond biology to covenant relationship — the accountability, shared prayer, and mutual encouragement of people who belong to one another in God.

The new life received through Christ radiates outward through exactly these relational spheres. 'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8). Jerusalem is first — the people nearest you, often the people hardest to reach because they know you best. The family and covenant community is the beginning of mission, not a retreat from it.

The Biblical Architecture

Identity That Survives Pressure

The Relational dimension of Daniel's life is illustrated in remarkable detail across the twelve chapters of his book. His Babylonian name was Belteshazzar — but the text continues to call him Daniel. He was educated in Babylonian wisdom — but maintained his own moral convictions. He was promoted to the highest levels of pagan government — but is never described as 'becoming Babylonian.' His identity was received from God and held in covenant community with his three friends; it proved impervious to decades of cultural pressure.

This is the model: not withdrawal from culture but resistance within engagement. Daniel did not refuse to learn Babylonian literature. He learned it better than anyone and remained the person God had made him. The question is not whether believers engage secular institutions, professions, or cultural forms. The question is whether the identity they bring into that engagement is secure enough in God that the engagement does not slowly become assimilation.

The Relational Uniqueness of Biblical Theism

Competing worldviews offer radically different answers to the Relational questions — and the consequences of those answers are not theoretical:

- **Secularism:** Human beings are highly evolved animals. There is no intrinsic dignity — only rights granted by social contract, which can be revised or revoked. Gender is biological but not meaningful; sexual expression is purely self-defined. Family is a social arrangement of convenience.
- **Marxism:** Human beings are defined by economic class. Dignity is a bourgeois concept used to maintain power. Family is a bourgeois institution used to transmit private property and should be weakened or abolished as class consciousness rises.
- **Postmodernism:** Human beings are constructed by language, power, and culture. There is no fixed human nature — only socially negotiated identities. Gender is a performance, not a design. Family is whatever those involved define it to be.

Each of these frameworks removes the transcendent anchor from human identity — the claim that we are made by Someone for something, and that our dignity, our design, and our community structures are grounded in that making. Remove the Maker and identity collapses into self-authorship: I am whatever I say I am, and no one has standing to disagree. The results are visible in the culture: a generation experiencing a crisis of identity unprecedented in human history, searching for belonging and meaning in every conceivable direction except the one where both are actually found.

Connections to the Revival Journey

The Relational dimension runs through every week of the Revival 2026 curriculum because revival is never merely individual — it is always relational:

- **Week 1 — Urgency:** The daily prayer for revival includes five spheres: personal heart, family, church, city and nation, world. The relational structure of those spheres — moving outward from the individual through family and covenant community — reflects the Relational dimension's architecture.
- **Week 2 — Repentance:** Repentance that is relationship-based rather than shame-based requires a secure relational identity. We repent not because we are worthless but because God values us enough to call us back. The Imago Dei is what makes repentance an act of love rather than an act of self-loathing.
- **Week 3 — Prayer:** Seeing people with spiritual eyes — their eternal destinations, not just their physical circumstances — is only possible when you hold the Relational conviction that every person is an image-bearer with inherent dignity and eternal significance. The intercession list of lost people that Week 3 calls for is a Relational act: naming, seeing, and praying for specific people who bear God's image.
- **Week 4 — Evangelism:** 'Brokenhearted boldness' flows from seeing people as God sees them — not as positions to be argued with but as image-bearers to be reached. The compassion of Christ for people is a Relational posture, not a strategic technique.
- **Weeks 5–6 — Generational Transmission:** Faith is transmitted across generations primarily through the family — the first and most formative classroom of every human life. Revival that does not reach the family does not reach the next generation.

The Question That Matters Most

FOR REFLECTION

Is your sense of who you are grounded in what God says about you — or in what the culture offers?

Babylon offered Daniel a new name, a new education, and a new diet. It could not give him a new identity — because his identity was not available for purchase. It had already been established by Someone with more authority than Nebuchadnezzar.

- **Humanity:** Do you actually believe that every person you encounter today — the stranger, the difficult colleague, the person who holds views you find offensive — bears the image of God and has an eternal destination? Does that belief change how you treat them?
- **Gender:** Is your understanding of male and female, sexuality, and marriage grounded in the creation narrative — or has it been quietly shaped by cultural assumptions you have absorbed without examination?
- **Family:** Is your home a classroom where faith is being transmitted in the ordinary rhythms of daily life — or is faith compartmentalized into designated times while the rest of life runs on different assumptions?
- **Covenant Community:** Do you have a covenant community — people who know you, pray with you, and hold you accountable — in which your identity in Christ is reinforced rather than eroded? Are you that for someone else?

A Prayer from the Awakening

Father,

You made us in Your image — not as an afterthought, not as an experiment, but as the crown of a creation designed to reflect Your glory. You made us male and female — two complementary expressions of Your image, ordered toward one another in covenant. You placed us in families and communities where faith could be spoken at the dinner table, walked out on the road, and whispered at the end of the day.

Forgive us for outsourcing our identity to a culture that does not know who made us. Forgive us for the ways we have let pressure, convenience, or fear erode the convictions You have established in creation and confirmed in Scripture.

Restore the Relational clarity we need. Anchor our identity in what You say about us. Protect our families as the first classrooms of faith. Build covenant communities around us that sustain faithfulness under pressure. And give us eyes to see every person we encounter today as what they are: an image-bearer You love, worth redeeming, heading somewhere eternal.

Let the Relational dimension of our lives be a witness to the truth that identity received from the Creator is more secure than any identity the culture can construct.

In the name of Jesus, who is Lord over all,

Amen.

Scripture Treasury

Foundational texts for meditation and further study

The Image of God — Human Dignity

Genesis 1:26–27 — *So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

Psalms 139:13–14 — *You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*

Titus 3:5 — *He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.*

Gender and Marriage by Design

Genesis 2:24 — *That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.*

Matthew 19:4–6 — *Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?*

Ephesians 5:25–33 — *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*

Family as First Classroom

Deuteronomy 6:6–7 — *These commandments are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road.*

Acts 1:8 — *You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

Proverbs 22:6 — *Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.*

Daniel's Relational Identity

Daniel 1:8 — *Daniel resolved not to defile himself — his identity in God determined his choices.*

Daniel 2:17–18 — *Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends... He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven.*

Daniel 3:17–18 — *The God we serve is able to deliver us. But even if he does not, we will not serve your gods.*