

## Each of us is created in a unique shape

Psalm 139

Have you ever reflected on how much variety there is in this world? It would be easy to think that God overdid the creation. Just look around you at each face. No two, even in the same family are the same. We would be surprised if any two of us were wearing the exact same item. And hair styles and color. One joy of travel is to sit and watch people. Each one is so different. God clearly loves variety.

God makes all shapes, sizes, configurations, and colors. In the animal kingdom, including fossils, the number is huge. Did you know that there are over 300,000 different species of beetles? Would not just 50,000 types do? What about just 10 species for different climate zones

And since we must deal with snow – we have wet heavy snow and light fluffy snow, but the Inuit have around 50 words for snow. The English language has around 40 descriptions for snow. Some of the familiar ones are, lake snow, blizzard, powder, snow drift, hoarfrost, snowpack, and of course, new snow & dirty snow. Scientists tell us that there are 18 million different snowflakes and not one of them is alike. Nobody else sees this except God.

Our scripture in the Voice says, “For You shaped me, inside & out. You knitted me together in my mother’s womb *long before my first breath*. I will offer You my grateful heart, for I am Your *unique* creation, filled with wonder and awe. *You have approached even the smallest details with excellence*; Your works are wonderful; I carry this knowledge deep within my soul.” (13-14)

**What can we learn from Psalm 139** and some other scriptures? They tell us God made each of us, so our Creator loves variety. God made each of us unique. There is no one in the world like you. There never has been and never will be. God only creates originals – not carbon copies. If you search the world over, you will not find someone with the same fingerprints,

footprints, or voiceprint. God intentionally made you to be different from everyone else who ever lived. God does this because each of us *are unique* and in His image.

Plus, we know we are *wonderfully complex*. We are so complex that we are a mystery to ourselves. The more we learn about this world, we find we have more to learn!

Despite our good medical knowledge, we know of people where it took a long time for doctors to decide why someone was sick, much less what to do. Years ago, a parishioner became sick & finally her doctors told her, she was the 17<sup>th</sup> documented person in the world with her illness. I told her it was proof she was unique.

All of us have had days, we do not know why we feel the way we are feeling. Some days we have acted in certain ways, & we are surprised and wonder why. Have you ever said something and later thought, “What was I thinking when I said that?” Often, we are mysteries to ourselves. Have you ever been in a group and found yourself reacting in the exact opposite way everyone else did? Then we think, “What is wrong with me?” Or we think, “What is wrong with them?” Relationships are complex. Because our individuality is unique.

A third thing we know and can learn more about is: *we are shaped for a purpose*. The Creator did not throw this world together just for fun. The Almighty has a reason to make this wonderful world full of variety. We are not here by accident. Your job is not to just take up space. You were designed by God, and you are not a mistake. The Bible says that each of us were purposefully, personally, orderly planned and designed by God. You were designed to offer your uniqueness to the world and to your Creator’s glory. Each of our genetic designs are on purpose for a purpose.

So, we each are unique, complex, and shaped for a purpose. And each of us are a combination of at **least five different factors**. They affect every area of our lives – our relationships,

careers, finances, our joys and hobbies, recreation, and our retirement. Even our successes and failures and attitudes.

At some point you may have looked at your **spiritual gifting**. The Bible says, “*But the truth is all people are different, each gifted by God in various and dissimilar ways.*” (I Cor 7:7)

There are at least 20 gifts listed in the Bible and I’ve seen lists of around 40. Every person and follower of Jesus has at least one and usually more. Their purpose is to give you purpose and to use it for the benefit of others. Every time you enjoy doing something, or are successful, you are revealing your giftedness. This impacts your work, your life, and your relationships.

So, it is important to take your time, test and realize who you are. I know a couple from Ontario who were told by a church member to consider pastoring. So, they gave up their jobs and attended Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary for a year. We were in small group together. At the end of the year, they said pastoring was not for them. They had the luxury of wealth and support to test this call.

I have a suspicion many church members who regularly cause trouble in church, have chosen to not follow God’s call. I know a person who had some amazing pastoral skills, who made life miserable for every pastor of his congregation. A few leaders knew this. Once, he even held secret, by invitation only, worship, in the church basement, during the regular worship service. But the church put up with this – I think because he was rich.

And I have a suspicion our gifting may adjust over time, with experience, and opportunity. Something comes in front of us and catches our attention. You are given an opportunity, or you took the opportunity. Your heart changes. Your spiritual gifting develops in a new area you did not expect. This is my story for ending up as an intentional interim pastor, with concern for change dynamics and congregational health.

Also, your **heart**, what motivates you, drives you, your core, helps create your unique shape. All of us have different motives, interests, and drives. Many of them come out with life skills we seem to have been born with. This ties in with the things we care about deeply. There are things you care less about. All this reveals your heart. Each of us have different hearts. It is a reason we have conflict in relationships. It takes work in any marriage, family, workplace, and church to have hearts in sync, with the same goals and similar perspectives.

The Bible says, “*It is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.*” (Phil. 2:13) Our Creator puts desires in our hearts. The way we discover what our heart is, our basic motivation in life, is to ask: What do I love to do? What am I good at? What do people appreciate about me? What do I dream about? What does my mind automatically turn to? What is God calling me to try to do?

These questions can focus on worldly things. But we also need to ask ourselves about Godly spiritual skills. We must not run away from basic interests that God has implanted in our lives. God wants a congregation to flourish, so people step up to fulfil the functions of His church. The Reimagining Committee encourages each of us to use our leadership abilities. If the Kingdom of God is to meet its goals, God needs people with hearts tuned to doing God’s work. What spiritual things motivate you? They will not be the same as others have.

Another part of our shape is our **abilities**. Paul in I Corinthians 12:6 tells us, “*There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.*” Some of this is innate. Some of this is learned. As some of you know, I never had to chance or took the time to learn to work with my hands. It is the same for what we label spiritual, or people work. But we can learn. Many people think they do not have a skill. But we can develop it, or at least get better at pretty much anything. We can look for opportunities to broaden our abilities and have new experiences.

My ability with technology is so so. But I have learned to use computers. I have learned to put a sermon together – even though I got the grade C in university in a class on speaking. At seminary the professor did not like my voice, so did not invite me to take the preaching class. The point is, we have natural abilities, we have skills we can develop, & we can gain talents.

Researchers have shown the average person has 500 to 700 different kinds of abilities. God says this is how we are shaped. Some of us are good at math. Many people are good with words. We all can work to improve our use of words. Some people are great with ideas and abstract thoughts and can put them together. We have mechanical minds, engineering skills, musical know how, work well with people, delightful cooking, and some of us have great organizational abilities. God made each of us with abilities and the capacity to learn and improve. God gave us these for the purpose to use them for His glory and Kingdom. And, to have joy and a sense of accomplishment.

Exodus 32:3 tells us, *“I have filled Bezalel with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills,”* for the building of the tabernacle. We are told, *“Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.”* (2 Cor. 3:5) The Almighty has given us gifts, hearts – basic motivations in life, abilities – natural talents and skills. And we have been given the ability to learn and improve.

We also have *personalities*. This is about the way we act, the way we feel, and the way we think. These go together because usually the way we think, determines the way we feel, and the way we feel usually determines the way we act. The root of each of our personalities is our thought life. Proverbs informs us, *“Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts.”* (4:23 GNT).

Personality is complex. Researchers say there are at least 18,000 personality traits. And when

we put them in combinations, the combinations are endless. We debate over nature or nurture about us. I think we can argue it is both. We know each child we have is different. But it is our personality is part of who we are. We can ask God for help to develop it in good ways.

Part of the nature and nurture conversation revolves around our *experiences*. We can be encouraged to surmount bad events in our lives. Or we can cave in – or fight. We must give more support and cheer on those who have had a lot of negative life circumstances, so they develop their shape as God intends for them.

Some people’s experiences aim their personalities, abilities, hearts, and spiritual gifts to not grow as God intends. So, we see that these five factors of our shape are inter-related. But we can trust God is at work in each of us. We can make sure we help His church to prosper.

Please quote Romans 8:28 with me. *“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”* Good and bad things occur in our lives, but the Almighty works to heal, and lead us, and teach us.

Some argue that our shape is fixed. Our real shape is fixed by God, but so often, each of these five factors – S, H, A, P, E, spiritual gifts, heart, abilities, personality, and experiences, become skewed & take us in warped directions. We do know these parts that make up our shape are interrelated. Each element influences the others because they work together. Our God given shape is generally fixed, constant, stable, and endures. If as a child you did pranks, at age 85 you will likely be pulling pranks.

As each of these aspects develop, and mature, we show the world some of God’s character, since we are created in His image. But life can skew us. A refugee with years of living in a refugee camp, undernourished, full of fear, with little hope, and a poor education, will come out different than if they had a normal safe healthy upbringing. But, still, our shape emerges. It is

irrepressible. An example is, in any field, regardless of the job description, people end up doing, enjoying, and flourishing at – what they want to do anyway. That is what they put their energy into. Why? It is usually our God given shape deep inside us. Plus the kind of parents we have is important in forming our shape.

These five factors have shaped us. Regardless of our work or family, it explains how we handle criticism. How we respond to authority. How we make friends. Why we lose interest in a task. It has influence on what makes us mad, sad, scared, or glad.

Here are 4 benefits of knowing yourself. First, it **reduces stress**. The Bible says to not compare yourself to others, but at times we need to do something we are not gifted in.

Second, it **increases success**. How many of us have been frustrated, doing what our parents expect? Then we stop pleasing our parents and choose to please God, because of our shape. For some of us it takes a lot of trial and error and testing and experimentation. This is not just about work. It is also about values and faith. I remember being caught as a teen going to a dance, and my mom told me I was wrong. I agreed to not go to dances, until I left home. And I never have done much dancing, but I enjoy it and think there is nothing wrong with it – except the temptations that can come with it. Success in life is knowing God’s will and being right in the center of it – enjoying your shape.

A third benefit to knowing yourself, is, it **deepens satisfaction**. A satisfying life is when you are doing what you were shaped to do, what God made you for. Freedom comes from discovering your shape and doing what you are gifted by God to do, and helping the Kingdom of God flourish. This brings much joy.

Fourth, knowing yourself helps **build self esteem**. There are many ideas about self esteem. Some are good. True self esteem is built on recognizing we are intentionally shaped by God for a purpose, and we fulfill that

purpose. We need to recognize that we matter to God. Jesus Christ proved how much God cares for you by giving his life on the cross. He did not die for junk.

This sermon outline comes out of a Rick Warren sermon. Many people have used his shape ideas in many ways. Also, my work with spiritual gifts, from my own experiences and encouraging congregations to improve their church health, as well as individuals to follow Jesus, influences this sermon. To remind us again, as the Reimaging Committee challenges us – now is the time to step up, take on a new challenge, step up to the plate, learn a new talent, and exercise your set of skills.

More than once I have counseled people that moving to another place, a new job, a new pay scale, or new spouse, will not enable them to escape their real issues or make them a success. To be a success in life, we must find our place, purpose, and values in the Kingdom of God.

Psalm 139 reminds us: *“For You shaped me, inside and out. God knitted me together in my mother’s womb long before I took my first breath.”* (13) *“Can I go anywhere apart from Your Spirit? Is there anywhere I can go to escape Your watchful presence?”* (7) It is the most amazing feeling to know how deeply my Creator knows me; the realization of it is so great that I cannot comprehend it. (6)

And we must pray, *“Explore me, O God, and know the real me. Dig deeply and discover who I am. Put me to the test & watch how I handle the strain. Examine me to see if there is an evil bone in me, and guide me down Your path forever.”* (23-24) May this be our prayer.

So at whatever stage of life you are in, seek ye first the Kingdom of God, His righteousness, and your unique shape within it. Your Creator will help you. In Brasil, we needed a guitar player. Rose who has some musical ability, chose to learn guitar, to play well enough, until a good guitar player can along. Over the years God brought us - several capable guitar players.