

*Surprised
by
Love*

The Unexpected Rescue
of God's Children

The Children

Do you remember the first time you held a baby in your arms? Remember the first time you held *your* baby? The countless nights you sat by the crib and watched your baby breathe? It's hard to put our feelings into words when we talk about our babies, our children. Even as they grow and go through the difficult teenage years, even when they don't behave the way we hoped they would, we still sneak into their bedrooms at night to caress their hair, because they won't let us caress them when they are awake. They are the apples of our eyes, our greatest treasures, and our ultimate pleasure. Our love for them would make us climb mountains, cross rivers, and

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face all kinds of perils. We think about our children when we are awake and dream about them at night (sometimes we dream about them during the day as well). They are everything to us. EVERYTHING!

How would you feel if one day your child was taken from you? What would you do if a kidnapper came along and convinced your child to follow him, deceiving her by

Surprised by *Love*

telling her that you no longer have her best interest in mind and that you are keeping her from true happiness? What would you be willing to give up to rescue her? Your honor? Your wealth? Your life? All of the above?

This booklet is the story of God and His children: His love for them, His excitement to have them, and His plan to be together with them all through eternity. And it is also a story about the kidnapping of God's children and what He did and what He gave up in order to rescue them. He simply refused to go through eternity without them—without you and without me. He gave up EVERYTHING so that He could be reunited with us!

Preparing their home

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). These seven Hebrew words that

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make up the first sentence in the Scriptures foreshadow the seven days of the creation process. God was preparing a *perfect* place for His children; they were the crown of His creation. As God was speaking their home into existence, He was also making qualitative statements about how well things were going. After the second day, “It was good” is found at the completion of

The Children

every day, signifying that God was pleased with how earth was becoming the ideal home for *His babies*. Each day starts with “then God said,” and it ends with “there was evening and there was morning.” Every day God gave a command, and the narrative highlights the accomplishment of each command as we get closer and closer to *the day* when His children would arrive.

By the end of the fifth day, there was light; the expanse that separated the waters; dry land and seas; all

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kinds of vegetation, plants, and fruit trees; luminaries in the firmament; living creatures in the waters; and birds in the air (see Genesis 1:1–23). How would you like *that* for a home? Can you feel God’s excitement as He prepared for the next day? Do you remember when you prepared your home for your baby? How your heart was beating faster, how you could hardly wait?

The day has arrived!

The narrative clearly and repeatedly highlights the importance of the sixth day over the previous five days of Creation. For example, in the Hebrew, this is the first time the definite article *the* is used with a Creation day: a

Surprised by *Love*

first day, a second day, a third day, a fourth day, a fifth day, *the* sixth day (see Genesis 1:31). *The day* has arrived!

On the sixth day, the goal of Creation would be revealed and the crowning piece manifested. Of all the days of Creation week, the sixth receives the longest coverage in the narrative. There is a two-part creation in this day; in the first part, God made the living creatures, the beasts of the earth, and, once again He assesses His work and says that “it was good” (Genesis 1:24, 25).

And then . . .

It was time! God was about to create His children—His babies. From this moment on, everything would be different. His universe would change forever. Their home was ready, the day had arrived. And God paused.

A divine counsel took place *exclusively* before creating humankind in the Creation narrative. As God is dialoguing in community, we get a glimpse of the uniqueness

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and climactic significance of this moment: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man’ ” (Genesis 1:26). “Man” (*‘adam*) is a collective name for humankind, as will be further explained in Genesis 1:27. God has reflected and decided to have children. You can almost picture in your mind a husband and wife in intimate conversation at the kitchen

The Children

table, planning the most important decision of their lives: “Let’s have children.”

God’s children would be in *His* image: “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Genesis 1:26). Humankind would bear God’s image and likeness; humans would be like God but not identical to God; in His image and likeness, but not gods. God had made the decision. In Genesis 1:26, we hear the voice of God in the first person. Then the narrator poetically re-

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ports the creation of God’s children in the third person, emphasizing that we were created in His image: “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:27). God is the only One who can “create” (*bara*’), this Hebrew verb is only used with God as a subject, no one else can “create.” God’s children are designated by gender, not by kinds or species like the animals. He created a male and a female ‘*adam*.’ The Creator created “procreators.” Each gender was bestowed with amazing and unique characteristics for a complementary and complete view of the image of God. Amazing! You and I are in the image of God!

Surprised by *Love*

God's children are then invested with authority. Their two assignments are to multiply and to subdue the earth, ruling over the animals. Their diet is specified and animal meat consumption is not part of it (permission to eat meat

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will come from God after the Flood). They have access to every seed-bearing plant and every tree that has fruit. They have dominion over the rest of creation on earth; this is their home. They, and only they in all of creation, are in God's image. The concept of the *image of God* appears only four times in the Jewish Scriptures, and all four instances are found in Genesis (1:26, 27 [twice]; 9:6). They all relate to the creation of humankind. Later on, Adam would have a child "in his own likeness, according to his image" (Genesis 5:3). You have children in your image. Humankind is created in the image of the Sovereign Creator, and as such, God delegates His sovereignty and now His children are to rule the

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earth. They hold the highest place in the created order. Are you feeling pretty special by now?

Well, God thinks that His children are more than special. When He evaluates His creative work of the sixth

The Children

day, He can't just call it "good" as in all the other days. No! The plants and the animals are good, the children are VERY GOOD! "God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was *very good*. And there was evening and there was morning, *the sixth day*" (Genesis 1:31; emphasis added). Yes, having a garden is *good*, having a pet is *good*. But having children is *very good*! This was *the* day they came to life, and God would always remember it, the way you remember *the* day your children were born. That was the most important day in your life! And it was *very good*!

The nursery

The specifics of how God created humankind are further explained in Genesis 2. "Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into

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his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). God formed man (*'adam*) from the dust of the ground (*adamah*); notice the word relationship between the man and the ground. I wonder if God kept looking at His child for a while before He breathed the breath of life into his nostrils. I wonder if He observed the newly formed body on the ground as a parent observes his newly born baby. I wonder how God felt as

Surprised by *Love*

He envisioned an eternity together with His children, created in His image.

God also decided that it was not good for the male human to be alone. He also created a complementary, suitable companion for him: the female human. Together they would portray the image of God (see Genesis 1:27).

Do you remember how you
prepared your child's nursery?

God fashioned the woman out of the man and brought her to him. He was ecstatic! He identified her as “bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23). He called her “woman” (*ishah*) because he was “man” (*ish*) (verse 23); he wanted to identify her with him. He was *really* excited! I wish all husbands would show such excitement for their wives! They were naked together and they felt no shame (see Genesis 2:25). Talk about a perfect marriage relationship!

As a proud parent, God decided to make a special place for His children. The earth was now beautiful, filled with flowers, trees, animals, and so forth. But still, God wanted to create a very special space just for them, a place of pleasure for His children, a nursery. Do you remember how you prepared your child's nursery? Remember how you chose the perfect color for her bedroom? How you stood in the middle of the room, considering the appropriate place for the rocking chair,

The Children

the diaper table, the tiny gym; how you were deciding where to place all the stuffed animals and what to hang from the ceiling for your baby's delight. Well, so did God.

“The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food” (Genesis 2:8, 9). Oh, this was such a special nursery! God planted the beautiful Garden just for His babies' delight. He *placed* humans in this unique place that He had de-

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signed for them. Can you imagine God planting trees that were not just good for food, but *pleasing* to the sight so that His children would delight in the beauty that surrounded them? Just like you did for *your* children, who are in *your* image.

This nursery garden was the place of ultimate beauty. In the ancient Semitic language of the Mediterranean Sea, the root word for *Eden* means “delight.” Furthermore, when the Jewish Scriptures (Old Testament) were translated into Greek, many years before Jesus Christ was born, the Greek word for “garden” utilized in Genesis 2:8, 9 was *paradeisos*. The Garden of Eden was, in

Surprised by *Love*

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In the midst of the *paradeisos*, God placed the “tree of life” (Genesis 2:9). The fruit of the tree of life was a visual and tactile reminder of the children’s connection with the Life-Giver. They were created to be eternal, just as God is eternal. They would eat and live forever. That’s who they were and that was the plan! We have eternity placed deep in the core of our souls, because we were made in the image of the Everlasting God.

First things first

Now that His children had come to life, the creation process was complete; it was done, finished, and perfect. It was time to celebrate! God ceased His work and blessed and sanctified the seventh day; the day that forever would point to the completeness and wholeness of God’s creation. The seventh day would be perpetually linked with Creation and Redemption. But wait! We haven’t discussed Redemption yet. It’s coming up in the next few chapters—and I can’t wait to tell you about it!

Humans were the children of God. And as such, they spent the very first day of their lives together with the Creator in the special Garden made for them, celebrating the completeness of God’s creation, of which they were the crowning masterpiece. The seventh day was *the* first day the Creator and His children spent together in intimate communion. “By the seventh day God completed

The Children

His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then

God did not just want a birthday celebration once a year—He wanted us to remember *every week, on the seventh day.*

God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (Genesis 2:2, 3). The Creator and His creatures rested together. Wouldn't you have done the same? Don't you love to take time to celebrate together with your children? Well, God did not just want a birthday celebration once a year—He wanted us to remember *every week, on the seventh day.* So, He set it apart and made it holy. His children would have a constant reminder that He was their Creator.

Your worth in God's eyes

In the ancient cultures of Egypt and Mesopotamia, the designation of being “in the image of God” was reserved exclusively for prominent people: kings, important officers, and royal rulers. The Genesis narrative emphasizes that God did not make such distinctions. When God decided to create mankind in His own image, He did not make some people more special than the others—He did not separate them by hierarchy and power. *Every human being* bears the image of God. The royal language

Surprised by *Love*

is used for every child of God, regardless of status, caste, gender, or position in society. YOU are a child of God! We are His royal children!

What are your children worth to you? Well, then maybe you are starting to get a glimpse of God's love for you and me. God rejoices over us with singing and shouts of joy (see Zephaniah 3:17), just like you sing for joy when you think of your children. And even so, God loves His children even more than we do.

“Can a woman forget her nursing child
And have no compassion on the son of her womb?
Even these may forget, but I will not forget you.
“Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of
My hands” (Isaiah 49:15, 16).

Take a moment to thank your Creator. Thank Him for deciding to have children in His image. Thank Him for loving us with a love so great that we can't even fully comprehend it. Tell Him how much you love Him be-

Every human being bears the
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cause He first loved you. And if you think that your efforts to communicate with Him are not good enough to reach the Almighty God, or that your failures make you unattractive to your Creator, just look at your refrigerator. Look at those simple drawings that your children

The Children

made for you. The one that says, “Mommy, I LOVE YOU.” Isn’t that messy colored paper the most beautiful work of art you’ve ever seen?