



For the Next Generation

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My name is Amber Phillips and I serve on our Family Ministry team.

The Imago Dei describes the image of God within each of us; you are the intentional impartation of an expression of God's unlimited creativity making up all that you are. If you look around in your community and the world you can see other one-of-a-kind masterpieces created in the Imago Dei—perfectly unique and purposefully designed by God.

It's this expression of Imago Dei in every individual that invites us to engage with the next generation in conversation about beloved community. If you have a child in your home or have spent time with children recently, you probably know that children are innately curious and are rapidly receiving information from you and their environment.

What if we as a community were intentional in teaching the next generation to recognize the Imago Dei in every individual? What if we considered the journey to living as a beloved community as part of the discipleship process? I believe the result would be a generation of young people that become the kind of people we hope to see leading our world.

How can we do this? First, we recognize that we are all starting at different vantage points. Maybe your experience with a beloved community is just beginning, or maybe you have dedicated your entire livelihood to advocating for different expressions of Imago Dei. Wherever you find yourself on this spectrum, recognize that you have influence on the next generation. As a leader, parent, teacher, community member, neighbor—your words and actions are influencing the children in your proximity.

Next, a few practical steps to lead young people in recognizing the Imago Dei in everyone.

- #1 Invest in relationships: All of us have something to learn from other people that have walked a different path or experienced life in unique ways. Be intentional in seeking out

families and individuals with a different perspective- maybe they have a different family structure than you or differing abilities from your family, or maybe they grew up in a different cultural context. Doing life together, sharing a meal, setting up play dates, is an incredible way to understand the world of another and recognize the unique fingerprint of God on others.

- # 2 Study Scripture: As you read the Bible together with your family, look for the moments where Jesus noticed the unique characteristics of an individual. The gospel narratives show different examples of Jesus stopping to talk to children, of honoring those with long-term illnesses, and of stepping across social barriers to engage with people of different ethnic, religious, or cultural backgrounds.
- #3 Curate your media: We all know that kids are consuming media at an all-time high due to smart devices on demand. Consider intentionally selecting books, tv shows, documentaries, and movies that show the life experiences of people in ways your family may not experience. Use the book or show as an opportunity to ask your child how they see the image of God in that person or character. Discuss how God uniquely created an individual and in what ways they are uniquely gifted and designed.
- #4 Share your journey: Children respond to authenticity and story. Don't be intimidated to start this process because you don't feel like an expert. Share your story, where you started, what you've learned, what you're processing and praying through. This invitation to vulnerability allows kids to be part of the process and gives them permission to grow and struggle too. Authenticity is the currency for the next generation.

While discipleship is a lifelong process, we know that the years before 18 are a critical moment for development and an opportunity to create a foundation for resilient deep faith. As a community, will you commit to helping our NCC families lead their children to recognizing the Imago Dei in every individual? Would you pray for families as they disciple the children in their homes? As a congregation, let us walk together and share our lives in a way that brings the next generation along into the beloved community.

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