



The full image of God

Description

By Naomi Chua

After the birth of our daughter, my husband published the following social media post announcing her arrival:

Introducing Zuri

Where based on Zuri's gender, Zuri will be more likely:
4 x sexually assaulted and/or threatened by age 15
7 x killed by a current or former partner
5 x hospitalised after assault by spouse or partner
26 % less earning capacity
25 x less likely chosen by our government for a ministerial position
And face disbelief about the existence and impact of sexism.

It was a sobering way to announce such a joyous event. This was my husband's hope that people would not just comment on her physical appearance but that it would raise greater awareness so that eventually the will for collective action and positive change could happen in her lifetime.

As I cocooned her in those precious early days of life, a prayer I wrote laced with tears was:

May you always know that you are created by God and for a purpose.
You are made in God's image, precious beyond compare.
He has uniquely gifted you.
You are seen. You are heard. You are known. You are loved.
May you always be able to use your voice and the gifts God has given you, without being silenced and without shame.

In Genesis 1:27-28, God created male and female in God's own image, blessing both as valued reflections of God. Without both in all areas of life, we can only have an imperfect image of God.

For so much of my life, I'm conscious of the imperfections of our current world. A world where all

suffer but also a world where women suffer moreâ€¦ a world where womenâ€™s voices are less heardâ€¦ a world where womenâ€™s gifts and contributions are less regardedâ€¦ a world where womenâ€™s leadership is less acknowledgedâ€¦ a world where womenâ€™s opportunities are lessâ€¦ A world where women are objectified and assaulted and abused to a greater degree than men. A world where even Godâ€™s church believe that the masculine image or perspectives of God is enough to give us a full image of God.

It is a world longing for the transforming good news of the gospel for all, male and female. The transforming gospel of a God whoâ€™s image is both male and female.

I have had the privilege to work in a local church context in Australia, minister amongst refugees in various countries in Africa, work in a christian international aid and development NGO, as well as lead a missionary team amongst asylum seekers. In each of these contexts I have seen the unique traits women have brought to their leadership roles which have given me a much fuller picture of who God is and the world and life God is calling us to.

The traits stereotypically associated with women and their leadership are **vulnerability, collaborative, nurturing, and holistic**.

During my years in South Africa I was humbled to walk alongside many refugees, many suffering with AIDS/HIV but all carrying the trauma of apartheid. As a part of our trauma healing work, it was a joy to establish the Healing Support Network, which encapsulated the feminine traits highlighted above. A group of women, mostly Gogos (grandmothers) who had lost loved ones to AIDS or were living with HIV, began meeting together to support one another in their vulnerability. Each woman was a leader in her community, but each drew strength from being connected to one another and working collaboratively. Each was drawn to their work in their communities by a deep sense of wanting to nurture and care for those who were ill and their families. This nurturing desire born of their own experiences of carrying and birthing children, and the accompanying awareness those experiences uniquely bring. They were holistic in their leadership as they interacted with church leaders, faith communities, families and individuals and honoured the contributions and interactions of those. Their compassion embraced the speaking of Godâ€™s good news as well as embodying that good news in their physical, social, emotional and spiritual care.

These Gogos, along with many other women leaders I have witnessed, **amplified the voices of the vulnerable and the marginalised**. The perspectives and the mere presence of women in key leadership roles in the church or in communities or organisations effected a **change in culture and societal structures where toxic masculinity, violence and abuse often flourished**.

This small group of Gogos impacted their churches, their communities and their country with lasting change. Through their vulnerability to share with and support one another they were powerful images of God that guided their families and communities through deep healing, eradicating much shame and stigma that had been a scourge on their relationships and instead created communities of peace and hope.

I want my daughter AND my sons to grow up knowing the fulness of what it means to be made in Godâ€™s image. That God has created and shaped and gifted each one of us to be a part of the whole body of the church. Each with a purpose. And that when the giftings and voices of half are silenced merely because of their sex, then the whole body suffers.

During my time in Africa I learnt a Zulu term called Ubuntu, that means “I am because you are, and you are because I am”™. None of us can fully be who God created us to be while another is not able to live up to their full God-given potential. In essence it is Shalom, that space where everyone and everything is flourishing, living to the full.

This is the world we are longing for – shalom. This is our prayer. This picture can only be brought about if women can be empowered to use their gifts, speak and be all that God created them to be, along with men.

God created male and female in God’s™ image, so without both in all areas of life, we can only have an imperfect image of God.

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Naomi Chua

I currently have the privilege of serving as team leader for Pioneers Refugee and Asylum seeker ministry here in Victoria. I am passionate about working amongst the vulnerable and displaced and am especially committed to empowering women to embrace their roles as change makers in their communities. I have worked amongst refugees and asylum seekers for the past 20 years here in Melbourne in a local church outreach setting and for a mission organisation. I also spent several years working throughout Africa in a trauma healing ministry and upon my return to Australia spent a few years in the christian international aid and development sector as State coordinator for Victoria and Tasmania for TEAR Australia.

I am married to Andrew, who inspires, challenges and supports me every day and we have 3 small children who are constantly amazing me and teaching me.

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