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B R Y A N T W E S T B R O O K



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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Several years ago, I began to have a strong desire within my heart—a desire for God to use my story to inspire and empower others to live life to the fullest. Through prayer and dedication, this book evolved from a mere idea into a tangible reality.

This journey has demanded an immense amount of effort, numerous revisions, and, truthfully, some tears shed while translating the stories onto paper. My hope and prayer is that this book will assist you in experiencing the fullness of life with Jesus as your Savior.

Every chapter has been written with this aspiration in mind. Throughout this process, I've continually revisited this core reason behind this book's creation.

This purpose has not only kept me grounded but also fueled my excitement about its message. I hope that as you read, my heartfelt intention becomes more evident to you, providing you with insight on my experience.

In addition to my overarching purpose, I have also been praying that two scriptures would illuminate your heart as you read:

Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. (Psalm 127:1a, NIV)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! (2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV)

Part of my prayerful desire is that this book will assist you in constructing a life where Jesus is the foundation. Life at its fullest commences with Jesus, and without Jesus it's impossible to attain. He is the ultimate

architect, the master builder, eager to underpin and contribute to every facet of our lives.

Thank you for embarking on this journey with me. As you dive into its pages and discover what the Lord has in store for you, I genuinely believe, with all my heart, that your brightest days lie ahead, not behind. Jesus has a life to the fullest awaiting you!

The best is yet to come!

Bryant

# PART 1: YOU ARE LOVED

# YOU ARE CUSTOM-MADE

Since my earliest memories, there's been one phrase that has echoed through my life, never wavering, never fading into the background. It's a phrase that's followed me relentlessly, and no matter how many years have gone by, the phrase never goes away.

This phrase echoes, "You look just like your mom!" And believe me when I say, it's not an exaggeration; I truly resemble my mom, almost like a guy version of her! It's something that everyone who has ever crossed paths with both of us has pointed out. My mom beams with pride at this resemblance, and I couldn't be prouder to be her son.

During my upbringing, whether it was a routine doctor's visit or a dental checkup, every time my mom and I went together, I always heard the same chorus, "You two look just alike!" And every new school year, from elementary to high school, during those nerve-racking open house events, I'd hear it once again, "You really do resemble your mama, young man!"

I have to admit, during my middle school years, it used to irritate me a bit. At that age, you're on the journey of self-discovery, and the last thing you want is to be perceived as an extension of someone else. It's a phase of life when you're striving to carve out your own identity, yearning to be known for just being you.

Now, years have passed, and I find myself living in Kansas, a world away from my Georgia roots. My mom still lives in Georgia, and I make it a point to visit whenever I can, usually during the blissful summer breaks or the heartwarming holiday season.

I'll never forget a couple of years ago when my wife, Allison and I were getting ready to fly back home from Georgia. It was my mom who drove us to the airport in Greenville, South Carolina. When we parked the car and strolled up to the Delta counter, the Delta agent looked at me first and then my mom. She chimed in with a friendly remark: "That's really sweet of you to bring your little brother to the airport." I couldn't help but think, "Seriously?" Oh, I almost forgot one important detail—it's not just that we resemble each other, but we also look quite youthful!

We appear so young that the agent assumed we were siblings. I couldn't even fathom who she thought Allison was! My mom calmly asserted, "I'm his mom." The agent, somewhat amazed, commented, "Wow! You two just look so alike each other, I thought you were brother and sister."

The uncanny resemblance to my mom is something that I'll carry with me throughout my life, regardless of how many birthdays come and go. I'll never outgrow it, and I'll never be able to escape it. Her likeness is a permanent part of me.

Perhaps you too bear a striking resemblance to your mom, dad, a grandparent, or even a sibling. If so, I can certainly empathize, and I'm sending some positive thoughts your way! I've heard it said that each of us has a twin somewhere in the world, and that's probably true. However, if that's the case, I haven't stumbled upon mine yet, aside from my mom, of course.

Just as I resemble my mom, you also share a remarkable likeness with someone out there. In fact, the resemblance might be even more remarkable than you can imagine.

You weren't mass-produced on an assembly line; you were carefully and perfectly designed to bear a resemblance to the Creator. Recognizing and embracing this truth is where the journey to living life to its fullest truly begins.

### **MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD**

Now, if you've never heard before that you were created in the image and likeness of God, it might sound a bit astonishing. You could be

wondering, "Are you telling me that I resemble God? How can that be?" Let's embark on a little journey together with an open heart and mind.

You bear a resemblance to the Creator of the moon, stars, planets, and all that surrounds us. What's truly remarkable about the Creator is the meticulous care with which He fashions His designs. When God fashioned the world, this is how the book of Genesis describes it:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. (Genesis 1:2-4 NIV)

Here, we witness the Creator crafting light and darkness from nothing. Contemplating the sun and how it bathes our planet in light is nothing short of breathtaking. The sun's precise position in space, just the right distance from earth, is a miracle in itself. I once read that if it were any closer, our planet would scorch under its heat. No human can even conceive the design that takes to pull off. From mountains and valleys to deserts, everything is uniquely fashioned.

Few experiences can match the beauty of a sunset: the sky painted in shades of orange and purple, adorned with big, fluffy white clouds. Whether it's a brisk fall morning or a scorching summer day, we are blessed to relish this magnificent creation together. As God created light and darkness and declared them good, He continued to shape the earth, filling it with vegetation and populating the oceans with diverse marine life. In the book of Psalms, we are reminded:

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him. For he laid the earth's foundation on the seas and built it on the ocean depths. (Psalm 24:1-2 NLT)



God's creative work didn't stop with the universe; His creation continued because He knew that His most treasured creation was yet to—come, and this most treasured creation was humanity. Notice the second sentence in the verse above: "all its people belong to him."

Have you ever eaten a delicious meal? And while savoring this delicious meal you were eagerly anticipating the best part, which is the dessert? That's me every time I know there's dessert involved; I can't help myself because I know the best is for last. Especially if it's something made out of chocolate—that's speaking my love language!

Here's how the Bible describes the creation of humanity, after everything else was created. After God had finished creating the world, the animals, and space as if He hadn't shown off enough already, He really shows off here. He saves the best for last!

God spoke, saying, "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflect our nature. So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle,

And, yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth." God created human beings; he created them godlike, Reflecting God's nature. He created them male and female. (Genesis 1:26-28a MSG)

Humanity is more like God than anything else He's ever created. We resemble God more than the earth, the sun, the planets, the ocean, or any living creature you can think of. God chose you to mirror His image because He loves you more than anything else. The scripture above conveys that God created us in His nature and what that means is God put things in us so that we would resemble Him.

God gave us what's called communicable attributes, or to put it simply, ways we are similar to God. It's like when you create something, whether it's a piece of pottery, a drawing on paper, or a canvas painting—you place your signature on it so people can recognize you as the author. That's exactly what God did with us.

You resemble God more than you can even imagine! We've seen the word "image" appear in the verses above; in Hebrew, the word for "image" is "tselem," which means "similar." You are uniquely crafted in the image of God, and you reflect who God is!

The tricky part is, many of us in today's world don't realize this. We often believe we're just the result of our parents or upbringing and nothing more. But that couldn't be further from the truth.

Let me show you some of the ways we share similarities with God:

### 1. Righteousness

Since the day you were born, you instinctively knew how to misbehave! No one needed to teach you how to toss your peas and carrots onto the floor, or how to nibble on people's fingers.

As you grew up, you became aware of your wrongdoings and began to discern right from wrong. Chances are, you observe injustices in the world around you. It might trouble you to realize that injustice exists, but you can distinguish it because of God. God is a just God. He loves justice and righteousness. We possess an innate sense of what's right, even though we don't always act accordingly. This sense of righteousness comes from God, who is inherently just and right. This longing in us for justice is directly fashioned in us from God.

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne. Unfailing love and truth walk before you as attendants. (Psalm 89:14 NLT)

### 2. Love

Love is at the core of God's essence, and He was the first to love. We, too, have the capacity to love because God loves first. He was the first to love. We share this attribute with God because we have the ability to feel and show love. There are people in your life whom you hold

dear—siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, spouses, or perhaps even your beloved pet. I understand the last one completely; I adore my dog, Riley. Our ability to love is a gift from God, instilled within us.

We love because he first loved us. (1 John 4:19 NIV)

### 3. Knowledge

A word often used to describe God is “omniscience,” which means all-knowing. God embodies knowledge, possessing awareness of everything there is to know. He has bestowed this quality upon us, enabling us to acquire knowledge as well. We engage in hobbies to improve our skills, and we apply knowledge in our daily careers to make informed decisions. Our capacity to gain knowledge and wisdom is a gift from God.

For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding (Proverbs 2:6 NIV)

The most fundamental parts and abilities you possess are a direct reflection of the One who loves you unconditionally. Your creation was purposeful, with careful thought and intention. If such profound consideration was given to your creation, imagine the intention behind the life you lead.

Consider these words from God after He crafted humanity:

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. (Genesis 1:31, NIV)

Let me draw your attention to something here: as we read through the creation story together, did you notice what God said each time He created something? He repeated the same word over and over again when something new came into existence:

God created the light and darkness, and He said it was “good.”

God created the ocean and all the animals in it and said it was “good.”

God made the sun and all the birds in the air and said it was “good.”

It’s interesting to pause here and acknowledge that God was pleased with His creation. He was pleased because we understand that you don’t call something good unless you truly believe and experience how good it is. However, there’s something different when He created humanity. Did you notice it earlier? God never described anything as “very good” until He made Man. He said it then, and He’s saying it now when He looks at you, saying, “Wow, look at him. Very good.” “Wow, take a look at her. Very good.”

Friend, don’t underestimate yourself as average or ordinary. You are not. You are above average, the pinnacle of God’s creation. God is not just the Creator of everything; He is also a loving father. He can be the most loving father you could ever have if you open your heart to Him. Remember this:

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You don’t just reflect God; you were made  
to know God and be loved by God.

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In the next chapter, we’ll dive into how God is a loving father who desires a relationship with you. He longs for you to know Him and to be an active part of your life. God didn’t end with giving you qualities that resemble Him; He deeply cares about you. His heart aches for you, and He eagerly desires to be with you in your everyday life.

I recently visited a massive aquarium in Oklahoma, and there, I noticed a parent who had lost their child. The father was frantically searching

everywhere, calling out his son's name, looking under tables, and asking people if they had seen his son. The terror on the father's face was evident.

All he wanted was to be reunited with his son. When this man's son was born, he didn't say, "OK, that's good; I can stop loving this child now." Instead, he vowed to love and protect His child. All this dad in the aquarium wanted was to be with his son. The same holds true for you as God is your loving father; all He desires is to be with you. He's actively searching for you, patiently waiting, and He deeply loves you.

I recently returned home to Georgia for one of those summer visits. At age twenty-nine, I'm not a kid anymore, and I'm a little older than when those stories took place above. When I returned home, I went with my brother, Kenly, to a local restaurant called Cafe Silo. There, we settled in to eat some good food; we each also ordered a glass of ice-cold southern sweet tea. As we enjoyed our meal, a man walked in.

I had never met this man before, I couldn't tell who he was or what his name was but guess what he said to me? He said, "I know who you are just by the look of your face, boy. You're Lisa's son ain't ya?"

I replied, "Yes, sir, that's right. How did you know?" He simply said, "You look just like her."

Just like I will never outgrow looking like my mom, we'll never outgrow reflecting God. Chances are you've lived your whole life and have never thought about how you resemble God. Just like you'll never outgrow resembling God, you'll never outgrow His love for you. I can't wait to keep going on this journey with you!

Now, let's take a few moments to reflect on what you've just read. Consider these questions and jot down your thoughts to keep track:

### MOMENT OF REFLECTION

- Have you ever contemplated God as Creator?
- How does it make you feel knowing that God crafted you with intention?

- How does it make you feel that when God created the first humans, He declared them "very good"? Do you believe this statement about yourself? Why or why not?
- How might understanding the content of this first chapter reshape your view of God and yourself?