

# HUMANIZE ME



Sometimes people say a public figure needs to be humanized. What could this mean except that there are things in this world that make us less than human? Jesus is on a mission to make you more human—the kind of human who looks more like the Son of God. This series tackles the forces that keep us from being just as human as God always intended us to be. And it leads us to discover that when we are humanized, we get to humanize others.



Are you creative? If you had asked me when I was 8-years-old, I would have said yes. You see at that time I liked to draw. My favorite subject was people. I would draw my family, my mom, my dad and my two younger brothers. I even drew my little sister Analisse who was yet to be adopted. I loved to draw. As I got older, I eventually stopped drawing and began taking piano lessons. Though I enjoyed practicing, I would get so nervous performing because I knew that if I made even one tiny mistake, everybody would notice. So I quit my junior year of high school. Perhaps singing could be my creative expression. I took choir classes and voice lessons for a year, but when tryouts for the varsity choir came around, I still wasn't good enough. Struggling to find my identity as a high school student, I prayed. God, who am I? What is "my thing?" What am I good at? What will I be known for? And surprisingly, I got a response: "You will be defined by me." Defined by you? What is that supposed to mean?

Fast-forward to seminary. I'm taking a free "personality test" offered by our psychology department. It was advertised to us Master of Divinity students as an opportunity to know ourselves better and perhaps discover more about what we were made to do. I am a personality test nerd. Myers Briggs, Strengths Finders, Enneagram—you name it, and I'm in. I even take those Facebook tests to see what superhero I am. You get the picture. Anyway, I sit down to take this test and I find myself answering questions like: "I hear voices"—answer: yes, no or maybe. Another question: "I don't tell anybody this, but I know for a fact that there are people stalking me who want to kill me." Or my personal favorite: "Everyone is jealous of me." So it's one of those kind of personality tests!

Eventually I got the results. Thankfully it revealed that I am not as out in left field as you might think, and I did learn some new things about my personality and who God made me to be. My results included themes like extroversion and introversion, which I was familiar with from Myers Briggs. However, there was another spectrum that caught my attention. Creativity. When I looked at the scale, I found that I'd scored an 8 out of 10. What? Me? Creative? Yeah, I sketched some as a kid, but I quit piano because I was terrified of making a mistake at a performance. And I still didn't make choir even though I took private lessons for a year. All these failures stacked up to what I thought would be an F on the creativity spectrum for sure. But to my surprise, there I was, off the charts creative.

In today's passage (Jeremiah 18:1–11) we're going to hear Jeremiah relate an experience in which he learned about God's creativity. And through this story, perhaps we'll see parallels to ourselves and discover that God invites us into His creative process, and He invites us to be responsive and create. This is the word of the Lord. We're grateful. So what's going on in this passage? Jeremiah is a prophet—not a bullfrog!—which means he has a particular calling from God to receive messages from God and share them with God's people. Prior to this

experience, Jeremiah had heard from God right where he was. But today God says, "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message" (Jeremiah 18:2). So Jeremiah might have been surprised. "What? Go down to the potter's house? Why? Why do I have to go somewhere different for you to speak to me? Why can't you speak to me here?" Even though he didn't know why God was calling him to break his routine and go somewhere new, Jeremiah goes. Sometimes God has to take us somewhere new to show us something new. I'm going to say that again. Sometimes God has to take us somewhere new to show us something new.

So Jeremiah obediently goes down to the potter's workshop to receive God's message. The phrase "go down" is a bit peculiar, isn't it? Why "go down" to the potter's house? Is that referring to "downtown?" Maybe it means "go south?" Perhaps Jeremiah was at the Temple when God first started speaking to him. The Temple was on a hill, so it would have been a little higher than other parts of the town. Also, the potter's workshop would have been at a lower elevation because he'd need to be near a natural flow of water.

"Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message" (Jeremiah 18:2). God's promise involves Jeremiah's participation. As Jeremiah takes that step, following God into that new location, God speaks. For my job as Missions Pastor at this church, I get to lead short-term trips to Guatemala, Cuba, Egypt and Mongolia. And I have seen and heard stories of how God has used short-term trips to speak to people outside of their normal routine. Though God has also used mission trips to transform me in various ways, I want to tell you about a time God used an internship right in my hometown to shape me in a new way. One summer during college, I was back home in Waco interning at a local nonprofit called Mission Waco. For the internship, the other nine interns and I lived in a house in inner-city Waco. Now I had grown up on the west side of town in the suburbs. No one from our part of town would've gone down to that part of town without good reason. But for six weeks that summer, I joined the other interns in a big, hundred-year-old house in inner-city Waco. We would bike to Mission Waco's offices every day. Each of us had different placements among the ministry's many branches. In the mornings I served at the Meyer Center, a resource center for the homeless—think Marian House meets Springs Rescue Mission.

Serving breakfast at the Meyer Center every day, I got to know John. After prepping and serving the meal, the other volunteers and I would grab a plate and eat with those who had stayed in the shelter the night before. One guest I got to know a bit was John, an older gentleman with long white hair, a white beard and big round glasses. One day I noticed that John had stayed afterwards to sweep. As I got to know John and his story, I found out he was a vet who'd gotten caught up in drugs as he attempted to recover from the horrors he'd witnessed in Vietnam. Over the course of the summer, John began to tell me how he'd gone through Mission Waco's transi-

tional housing program, stayed sober and was about to move into his own place. John was still around sweeping because he wanted to give back. A transfer of agency had taken place as he'd moved from a recipient of Mission Waco's services to a contributing volunteer.

Before this internship, I'd been pretty judgmental toward the homeless folks I saw around town. You see, when I was 9, I had been to Central America with my family and I'd seen "real" poverty. I had compassion for the folks living under dehumanizing poverty there, but for the poor of my own city I had no compassion. "Why don't they just get jobs?" I thought. Then I met John, and my judgmentalism was exposed. Through relationships with him and with others I got to know through Mission Waco, I began to see "the poor" of my city with Christ's eyes. My attitude toward them shifted from a dehumanized "other" to real humans with real stories. Though their life experiences were much different than mine, that did not make them any less than human. In fact, their experiences textured their humanity. They became more real to me. You see, it took going down to the other side of town for God to speak to me there. Because sometimes God has to take us somewhere new to show us something new. And that is what God did with Jeremiah. Jeremiah walks down the hill to the other side of the city and comes to the potter's house. He steps inside and begins watching the potter at the wheel. He's crafting a pot, and it doesn't come out right, so he starts over with the same clay and makes a new one. From the way (Jeremiah 18:3–6) is written, we understand that Jeremiah watched the potter do this several times. While Jeremiah is watching all this, God speaks: "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel" (Jeremiah 18:6). This analogy of God as the potter and humans as the clay would not be a new analogy to Jeremiah. Previously in the Bible, we see God crafting the first human, Adam, "from the dust of the ground" (Genesis 2:7). Also, another prophet named Isaiah uses the same analogy: "Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand" (Isaiah 64:8). The words "formed" and "potter" actually share a common root. It can mean to fashion, shape, create or plan. So a synonym for potter could be shaper or craftsman.

So what do we learn from all this?

I. God is the shaper.

In this passage, God is depicted as "the shaper," the artisan. He is a creative being with a creative imagination. God is purposeful in His design. He has an idea in His mind of what He wants this clay to become. He is the skilled craftsman who is shaping the clay according to the creative design He has for what it can be.

II. We are the clay.

We are God's masterpiece. God is forming and shaping each one of us. God is the one who formed us out of the dust. He shaped us from our inception (Psalm 139:13–14) until now. This process is intimate. God's hands are on us, they're on our lives. God is personally, tangibly involved in this shaping process. God created us in His image, and He is intentionally crafting us with purpose in mind.

III. Creative conflict emerges.

However, there's a problem. The clay seems to have a mind of its own. The craftsman is working with the clay. He has a particular design in mind. But, to his disappointment, the clay doesn't turn out like what he was trying to make! So he gathers the clay in his hands, squishes it back into a lump and starts over. (Jeremiah 18:4) In this analogy, God, the potter, is highlighting our participation in His creative efforts. We can respond positively or negatively. We can lean in to the direction God is leading us and shaping us, or we can resist. I don't think I have to tell you that we all resist at one time or another. Some of us have been resisting our whole lives. Others of us try following God with all our best efforts, but still we shock ourselves when we find we're not perfect. We've all messed up. Even the best of us don't live into our God-given identities and callings. We don't even live up to our own ideals.

But God, in his mercy, invites us to be made new: "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Corinthians 5:17 New Revised Standard Version). God invites us into the process of being remade into a new creation. How is that possible?

IV. Fully Human, Perfect Masterpiece.

God sent Jesus to be the perfect human we never could be. Jesus showed us the way to live into our humanity as God had always dreamed for us to be. God is in the process of restoring each of us and crafting us into the unique person He'd always had in mind for us to be. As we join God in this process and lean into the ways He's shaping us, we discover the prized work of art that we are. We also begin to see others in the same way, and we join God in helping them step into the fullness of who they were created to be as well.

Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago" (New Living Translation).

Another Bible translation of this verse calls us God's "workmanship" and states that we are "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (English Standard Version). We were, and are, designed and crafted with purpose and intentionality. God has planned good works in store for us to do. He knows our creative potential and he's calling it forth. So again I ask you, "Are you creative?" Sometimes we deny the creative potential God placed inside of us. Sometimes we get so caught up in the grind that we fail to pause and reflect. Have I been responsive to God's invitations? Have I been leaning into the direction God is trying to shape me, or am I resisting?

V. Activating our creative potential: created for good works.

You see, just as God is creative with us as individuals—crafting and shaping us—God is also creative in the world. He made the earth we live in good, but because of the dehumanizing forces in our world—sin, brokenness, pain—the world is not as it should be. In Christ, God came to restore all things. That process began while Jesus was on earth. He called it "the Kingdom of God."

And by the Holy Spirit, God is still about this work of making all things new (Revelations 21:5). When we see something in the world that is not as it should be, when our heart breaks for something that is broken, God invites us to respond to his invitation to bring restoration, to create a new way. In one of my favorite books on creativity, Adam Grant observes, "If the world is supposed to be this way, we don't need to be dissatisfied with it. But acquiescence also robs us of the moral outrage to stand against injustice and the creative will to consider alternative ways that the world could work. The hallmark of originality is rejecting the default and exploring whether a better option exists." So a key element of our God-given creativity is a discontentment with the world as it is. God stirs within us a desire to explore a better way.

George and Carolyn Cresswell—Hope and Home  
Some of you know Dr. George and Carolyn Cresswell. They are longtime members of our congregation. After years of practicing child psychiatry and seeing children moved from foster home to foster home, Dr. George had had enough. He was tired of seeing this happen over and over again, so he felt compelled to find a better way. Let's turn our attention to the (video) screens to hear how he and Carolyn rallied their community to respond and create a new way. Isn't that amazing? This is the church in action, y'all. This is a lump of clay that responded to the potter's hand. People collaborating with God to make something beautiful and new. Maybe God is tugging on your heart or rattling your thoughts with something that could be done better. The way that things are is not good enough; you know of a better way. I'd encourage you to share that idea with your community, as George and Carolyn did.

Maybe you are the person with the creative idea. Or maybe you are like the Pathfinders Sunday School class, part of a team that rallies around the cause. Whatever your role, it might be easy to become overwhelmed with the size of the problem. We might be tempted to believe that our tiny efforts won't make any real change. But I want to encourage you with a message from the prophet Zechariah: "Do not despise these small beginnings, for the LORD rejoices to see the work begin" (Zechariah 4:10, New Living Translation).

God, the potter, is molding and shaping us. He is crafting us into new creations in Christ, and He is inviting us to activate our creative potential to join Him in bringing about new things in our world. God has made you to make. He is inviting you to step up and take your role as God's masterpiece, to join God in remaking the world. And remember that sometimes God has to take us somewhere new to show us something new.

So, will you respond to the potter's hand? What will you create?

## STUDY GUIDE

### HUMANIZE ME • "Made to Make"

#### Jeremiah 18:1–11

#### **UP:** Connect With God Through Spending Time in His Word

Read aloud the passage for the week: Jeremiah 18:1–11.

- 1) Reread verses 1–2. Jeremiah hears from God and is instructed to go to the potter's house to receive God's message. Where does God speak to you most clearly? When are you most likely to hear from God?
- 2) This passage shows God as one who creates and forms. We have been formed in the image of God which, in part, means that we are also to create (also see Genesis 1:27–28). Describe a time when you've been inspired by something a person created. In what ways did this reflect God's character?
- 3) How are you already living into this mandate to create? Or, how might you live into this creative mandate to reflect God to those around you?
- 4) The second half of this passage serves as a call for Israel to repent and return to God. While these verses sound harsh, in what ways might they reveal God's love for His people?
- 5) In what ways might this passage challenge you to think differently about what it means to be human?

#### **OUT:** Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)

CityServe is coming up October 5. This event provides a fantastic opportunity to join in the humanizing work of Jesus in our city. Visit the CityServe site to see where you might participate! Go to [firstprescos.org/cityserve](http://firstprescos.org/cityserve).

#### **IN:** Connect with Each Other

Take a few minutes to pray for CityServe. Pray that final details will come together, pray for the churches that will be involved, pray for the people at the various service sites and pray that this expression of the unity of the Church will inspire our city to investigate Jesus.